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REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

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*Horizon*

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

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GERMAN WRITERS OF TODAY BY HEINRICH FISCHER

HENRI LAURENS BY LÉON KOCHNITZKY

A STUDY OF TOYNBEE BY TANGYE LEAN

INNOVATION AND TRADITION IN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC—I:  
THE TRADITIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MUSIC OF  
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# HORIZON

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Vol. XV No. 85 January 1947

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
DEPARTURE PLATFORM	<i>Kenneth Allott</i> 1
CAMELS } SONG }	<i>Terence Tiller</i> 2
GERMAN WRITERS OF TODAY	<i>Heinrich Fischer</i> 3
HENRI LAURENS	<i>Léon Kochnitzky</i> 15
A STUDY OF TOYNBEE	<i>Tangye Lean</i> 24
INNOVATION AND TRADITION IN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC: I—THE TRADITIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MUSIC OF ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG	<i>René Leibowitz</i> 55
LETTER FROM MEXICO	<i>Victor Serge</i> 63
SELECTED NOTICES:	
LANGUAGE, TRUTH AND LOGIC	<i>Bertrand Russell</i> 71
AUTO-DA-FÉ BACK THE FOLDED LEAF }	<i>Philip Toynbee</i> 73

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appear between pages 16 and 17, 20 and 21

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KENNETH ALLOTT  
DEPARTURE PLATFORM

Always to look like this  
At the unmeeting place:  
Scrambling of crowds and air  
When the gilt clock-hands move  
Across the wet moon-face  
(Seen, cheek touching lip,  
Through your distracting hair)  
To enter time again  
Where disappointments live  
In shabby comradeship.

*All this is nothing new*

Still on the stroke of four  
A wilderness of rail  
Into which we have come  
Feeling like all the lost  
Ten tribes of Israel,  
Maybe to see and hear  
The hobbled tree of steam  
Lofting between the wheels  
Its paradisa! hiss  
Under a dripping roof;

*The rain still falling now*

To share a jealous dream  
Of pert and slithering heels  
In the rain's puddled glass,  
Who have the time I leave,  
And all the afternoon  
A bitter nail, a clove,  
A high, blind window pane  
When the black pistons drive  
Where but away from love.

*Now there is nothing new*



## TERENCE TILLER

### CAMELS

I see them swaying their strange heads like geese,  
nineteen camels in a string like geese in flight;  
as if approaching a problem, or in quest  
but baffled a little, a little unsure of their right.

But I am glad their supercilious look  
sees as I see the powdery town, the tall  
activity of streets, the buttoned-up faces,  
the cars like secret agents, the want of it all.

Gentle and sure as pianists' hands, their feet  
deliberating on the stone press out  
in rhythms that have nothing to do with us  
the coins of their aloofness in scorn or doubt:  
the motion of the blind or the very proud:  
they could be blind; but where their masked eyes fall  
they have the sailor's distant and innocent gaze  
for where this ends, for the limit and want of it all.

### SONG

A poem for a minute  
for the embracing smiling  
light upon a planet  
sown flower swelling  
where there is no time being  
waiting or double seeing  
is the budding of bells  
in the happy pulse.

And silver-glass for bodies  
in bodies soft embracing  
for the flower the word is  
the stream of mirrors kissing  
there being no time being  
waiting or double seeing  
where the seconds curl  
in garlands from their scroll.



Every word a mirror  
a watershed shining  
jewel and giver and wearer  
the difference of joining  
being made no time being  
waiting or double seeing  
carry the poise of pearls  
or crystal-pulsing hills.

*HEINRICH FISCHER*

GERMAN WRITERS  
OF TODAY

THE German scene today, a scene of ruin and chaotic disintegration, is an outward and visible sign of the collapse of the human spirit—the reflection and the result of not six but twelve years of war and terror. Grotesque confusion reigns in the literary life of Germany today. It is so grotesque that one is often scarcely able to distinguish which of the German writers was a criminal accomplice of Hitler, and which was one of Hitler's victims. To get even so much as the broad outline of this bewildering situation into focus, one must begin by drawing attention to some of the peculiar characteristics of the German intellectual landscape.

One of these peculiar characteristics has struck every foreigner who has begun to explore German literature as astonishing, and often downright incomprehensible. This was so, long before Hitler came on the scene. German writers show a remarkable turn of speed in their Protean self-transformations from one day to the next. In other countries the creative writer sets the intellectual fashion; in Germany the fashion creates the writer. There have been cases where German writers, within a single decade, have changed not only their political convictions, but also their style, and their whole approach to literature and life, and changed them not once only, but three or four times. This supple versatility, exemplified by many of the leading writers of Germany from Gerhart Hauptmann to Hans Carossa, is one of the

most ominous symptoms in modern German history. And it was more than a symptom. As time went on the German reading public had been trained by experience to give up any expectation that their creative writers would prove consistent, or even in any way ambitious to appear consistent. Literature, even with authors who indulged in ethical or political mouthings, had become essentially a thing of subjective feelings. That this was so was grimly confirmed as soon as Hitler seized power. The heart of the evil was not so much the terrible silence of acquiescence—not a single voice of protest was raised inside Germany—far worse was the right-about-turn of the German writers, their easy, automatic conversion to National Socialism, which seemed to them no more than a successful literary trend, to which one should, of course, attach oneself as soon as possible. One had so often attached oneself to other successful literary trends before.

It would be less than just to say that this joining up with the victorious movement—often entirely without any conscious political judgement—was a mere matter of opportunist calculation. Part of the tragedy was that National Socialism appealed to another side of the modern German writer—his deliberate turning of his back upon reality. Beginning with Stephen George the writers of Germany had isolated themselves from the world around them. The methods were extremely various, but the self-isolation from the real world was the same. The great names of German literary history in the past forty years all illustrate this melancholy theme; from the unresting, unsatisfied wanderings of Rilke, to the apocalyptic dream-landscapes of Franz Kafka, the star-lit world of that great poetess Else Lasker-Schueler, the hymn-filled churchyard of the Austrian lyric poet Georg Trakl . . . These outstanding individual tragedies were played to the accompaniment of a dance of satyrs, thousands of lesser men, aping the great, magnetically attracted by the vague mysticism of Hitler's Third Reich. But it was twenty years before Hitler that a keen-eyed German writer, Jakob Wassermann, clearly depicted this type of irresponsible amateur literary gentleman. This is how Wassermann described them:

‘The capacities of the German literary dilettante are surprisingly swollen by the forces of jealousy and envy. It is to jealousy and envy, and to very little else, that one should ascribe his occasional ability to hit upon the gestures, rhythms, and melodies of the real

artist. He loses himself in a strange form of exaggerated mimicry, in which genuine and great works of art live again in a pale, shadowy, regurgitated, emotional, unreal existence. He exaggerates what was already more than life-size in the original, and he complicates what was simple.'

The ugly game of 'complicating what was simple', dressing up the naked bestiality of Hitlerism in a mystical and mythical disguise, was played by German writers for a dozen years. The most innocent of them passed the horrors of Hitlerism by as though they were no concern of literature. This unreal realm of 'pure beauty, liberated from the limitations of time and the age', gave a cultural façade which was a very welcome assistance to Hitler and Goebbels. With or without the deliberate intention of the German writers, this was what the new German culture meant.

★ ★ ★

After the collapse of Hitler's Reich, there were vital questions to be answered. How will the leading literary figures in Germany use their restored freedom of utterance? How will they face the new situation? How will they cope with it? They had a great opportunity. They still have a great opportunity. It is the opportunity meant by Karl Barth when he said: 'Germany is a great Prisoner-of-War camp—the Germans are prisoners both in their own country and abroad. But Germany has one advantage today over all other countries. There is nothing left for Germany but to begin at the beginning.' In the world of literature that means: to find the way back to reality; the way out of nebulous mysticism, the way towards personal responsibility; away from ingenious excuses built into a regular method of composition and thought; towards the frank general confession of the guilt in which all have sinned and shared.

It should be said at once that some German writers have recognized this responsibility and this obligation and have not kept silence. The East-Prussian novelist Ernst Wiechert, an open opponent of the Hitler regime, who was sent, for his opposition, to the Buchenwald concentration camp, made a speech, a few months after the capitulation, addressed to the youth of Germany. 'We knew,' said Ernst Wiechert, 'we knew it all, we knew what went on in the concentration camps. We knew, and we did nothing, with our eyes open. We shuddered with horror, but we did nothing, with our eyes open. . . . Let us recognize that we are

guilty, and that perhaps it will take a hundred years before the stains of guilt can be washed from our hands. Let us recognize that we have to suffer hunger because the others died of hunger.'

But there were not many voices speaking in that tone. The great majority of German writers, musicians, and men of the theatre, kept silence in the first few months after the capitulation, anxiously and expectantly waiting for the punishment or the liquidation that they feared. But there was no special punishment, with the rarest of exceptions, and soon the volunteers began to report for service. The best-known figures of Hitler's German culture began to write in the new German newspapers licensed by the Allied Military Government authorities. Their articles began with all sorts of excuses, the most varied assortment of alibis, the most passionate abuse of the Hitler regime, and the most exaggerated glorification of England, Russia and America. Here are a few characteristic examples from this entertaining ring-a-ring-o'-roses. Emil Jannings, the actor, the personal friend and film hero of the Führer, publicly announced that he had a Jewish grandmother, born in Russia. Dr. Karl Scharping, the radio commentator, one of Goebbels' closest colleagues, who had been excelling himself a few months before in the most extravagant abuse of Great Britain, solemnly wrote a letter to the B.B.C., asking for a job. This letter, which was afterwards broadcast in full by the German Service of the B.B.C., was addressed to the man whom Scharping evidently considered his opposite number on the Allied side, Lindley Fraser. Scharping wrote: 'You and I have often crossed swords in the past two years. Our duels were an almost regular fixture on the air. Both you and I have always avoided derogatory personal remarks. . . . I am convinced today that a new Germany can only arise under the protection of Great Britain, and that it would perhaps be best of all if Germany were to be incorporated tomorrow into the British Empire.' (The only public comment which the B.B.C. allowed itself was the quotation of a couple of the more high-spirited remarks about the British Empire uttered by Scharping just one year before.)

When the American troops entered Bavaria, the well-known writer Erich Ebermayer was not slow in presenting himself and offering his services to the Americans as a passionate opponent of Hitlerism. He was appointed Mayor of a Bavarian town. But the Munich newspaper *Neue Zeitung* was then unkind enough to



print a letter which Ebermayer had written in 1942 to someone who had criticized his writings. This letter was a veiled threat, in which Ebermayer boasted proudly of his excellent connections with Goering and Goebbels. It was a typical case, and the Munich *Neue Zeitung* analysed it like this:

Erich Ebermayer, the writer, now mayor of Kaibitz, is the son of the late democratic Chief Attorney Ebermayer, and the cousin of the National Socialist 'Reich-Leader' Philipp Bouhler. Although Erich Ebermayer was the cousin of a 'Reich-Leader', he had difficulties in the Third Reich from time to time in getting his work published. Although he had these difficulties, he was one of the most highly thought of Nazi film scenario-writers. Although he was one of the most highly thought of Nazi film scenario-writers, he employed, for many years, and at considerable personal risk, a Jewish secretary. Although he employed a Jewish secretary, he wrote to a colleague who had criticized one of his books the letter which the *Neue Zeitung* reproduces. Although he was capable of writing such a letter, he seized the first possible opportunity after the fall of the Nazis to publish an advance excerpt from his forthcoming three-volume diary *Night over Germany*, in which he describes the deep abhorrence which overwhelmed him when Goebbels & Co. went book-burning. And although this same man was capable of penning both this letter and this description of his deep abhorrence, his father was an eminently respected democratic Chief Attorney . . . no wonder foreign observers shake their heads over such double-sided 'characters'. No wonder many Germans blush at the thought of them.

This list of absurd examples could be multiplied hundreds of times. One of the fashionable authors of the Nazi years, Otto Flake, publishes an 'appeal to the German intellectuals', in which he excuses his weakness, and their weakness, by appealing to the example of Goethe and invoking the support of Chinese philosophy. 'We yielded to pressure,' he writes, 'certainly we yielded to pressure, but that was in innumerable cases with the significance of the Chinese philosophy of the Tao—to bend, not to break, but to survive. In Germany we have learnt the lesson that one should develop one's personality in fields other than the political. *The example of Goethe is still our persuasive teacher . . .*'

This unhesitating, unblushing attempt of the German writers simply to wipe out the memory of the past twelve years, as though they had been a mere unsuccessful literary vogue, led to some paradoxical contradictions. It was announced in a German newspaper that the novels of Hans Fallada (whose work is well known in England) were to be removed from the public library in Berlin because of their Nazi tendencies; and in the same issue

of the same paper appeared an interview with Hans Fallada, in which he announced that he is now writing a great anti-Nazi work, since he considers it his duty to educate the youth of Germany.

But the outstanding example of this powerful impulse of self-advertisement and self-justification is seen in the controversy, which raged around the figure of Thomas Mann—a controversy, which filled the columns of the German and Austrian newspapers and periodicals for many months.

★            ★            ★

Not even Thomas Mann had entirely escaped the danger of that isolation of the mind, which was the great danger which lay in wait for the writers of Germany in the years before Hitler got to power. With Thomas Mann it was the danger of a formalistic pseudo-classical isolation. But what Thomas Mann suffered and learned from Hitler gave all his later utterances the strong force of a genuine reality of expression greater perhaps than he had ever had before. That was why his broadcast addresses to the German people had such extraordinary life in them, and had such a powerful effect upon those who heard them. Yet for the intellectual spokesmen of Germany, Mann's broadcasts seem to have been a literary effect, and nothing more. One had the impression that these intellectual spokesmen of Germany were somehow expecting Thomas Mann to ride through the Brandenburg Gate on a great white horse, in a triumphal procession after the Allied victory, embracing the writers of Germany with one wide gesture of reconciliation. A mediocre writer of historical novels, Walter von Molo, who had glorified Frederick the Great and the Hohenzollerns, published an open letter to Thomas Mann, and appealed to him, through the columns of the German Press, to come back to Germany as soon as possible, and to set himself up as Leader of the new intellectual movement. In particular he called upon Thomas Mann 'to march forward in the very forefront of the battle'. Thomas Mann refused. The letter to von Molo in which he conveyed his refusal started an excited, confused and often comical debate. These were the most important passages in Thomas Mann's reply:

. . . It pleases me, of course it does, that Germany wants to have me back again. But I am also struck by something disquieting, something oppressive about these appeals, not to say something illogical, and even unjust, and



certainly not very well considered. My dear Herr von Molo, you know how difficult it is to give advice and help in Germany today, in the almost irretrievable disaster which our wretched German people has brought upon itself. I am old. The stirring times we have lived through have greatly strained the muscles of my heart. Can I make any considerable contribution at first hand, on the spot, in the flesh? Can I do anything to raise up those who have fallen so deeply? It seems to me decidedly doubtful . . . Can these twelve years, and all the work they have done, simply be wiped from the memory as though they had never been? . . . You, Herr von Molo, never knew the exile's asthma of the heart, the uprooting, the starts and terrors of the man without a home. There have been times when I found myself infuriated at the advantages which you continued to enjoy. They seemed to me a denial of our solidarity. If, at the very beginning, the whole intellectual world of Germany, every man and woman who had a name, and a name known the world over, had risen up in a single movement of repudiation of that disgrace, if every one of us had proclaimed a general strike and left Germany, that would have made some impression, both abroad and at home. If we had all done that, the future would have been very different from what it proved to be . . . Germany gives me terrible forebodings. How could I be insensible when long letters come pouring in to me from Germany today, full of protestations of devotion so long kept silent? It stirs one's heart to read these letters, and yet my delight in them is chilled, not only by the thought that none of these letters would ever have been written if Hitler had won the war, but also by a kind of naïve insensibility, a lack of feeling, which comes out in the way they try, without any preliminary apology, to pick up again the threads which were cut twelve years ago, just as if these twelve years had never been. It is not only letters—sometimes I am sent books. Ought I to confess that I was not pleased to see these books, and quickly put them out of my sight? It may sound superstitious, but to my eyes books, which were even so much as permitted to be printed in Germany from 1933 to 1945, are worthless, and worse than worthless. It is not good even to touch them. An odour of blood and infamy hangs about their pages. There is nothing for it but to pulp them all . . . Amongst the many tortures which we had to suffer was seeing how German thought and German art were continually pushing themselves forward as volunteer stalking horses for the abomination of desolation. How could anyone think he was honourably employed if he got a commission to produce Wagnerian decorations for Hitler's Bayreuth. It is a strange case, which seems to indicate blind eyes and a heart of stone. A man goes off to Hungary, or some other European country, with a pass signed by Goebbels in his pocket, and delivers some clever lectures, cultural propaganda for Hitler's Reich. I don't say that that was a scandalous thing to do, I simply say that I cannot understand it, and that I am embarrassed when I think that I might ever have to meet such former friends again . . . How was it possible that Beethoven's *Fidelio* was not forbidden in Germany all these past twelve years? Beethoven's *Fidelio* was the inevitably right Festival Opera for the day of the self-liberation of the Germans. What a scandal that there have been excellent productions of *Fidelio*, singers to sing it, musicians to play it, a public to hear it! What stolid stupidity to sit through *Fidelio* in Himmler's Germany without covering one's face with one's hands, without leaving the opera house

in horrified haste! . . . I am eager to learn all I can in every possible way about what is going on in Germany. News from Germany catches my eye before news from all the wide world besides, that world which is proceeding to reorganize itself with very little thought for what happens to Germany. All this shows me, day after day, with what indestructible bands I am united to that old country which 'expelled me from the roll of its citizens'. An American, and a citizen of the world? Yes, that is what I am, but how should I deny that my roots are where they are, and that in spite of all the horrors committed by those who have gone a-whoring after strange gods, it is in the German tradition that my life and work are set?

I shall never cease to feel myself a German writer, and even in the years when my books could see the light only in English translation, I have always been faithful to the German language, not only because I was too old to work in a new language, but also because I knew that my work has its modest place in the history of the German tongue. The novel I wrote about Goethe, *Lotte in Weimar*, was written in Germany's darkest days. A few copies of it were smuggled in to you. It is not exactly a document of forgetfulness or abandonment of Germany. And I have no need to say:

Shame takes me for those hours of ease,  
With you to suffer were my gain.

Germany never gave me hours of ease. I have suffered with you, and it was no exaggeration when I wrote in my letter to the University of Bonn about the anxiety and grief, the rack upon which my thoughts, my whole life, were tortured, and from which not one hour of my existence has been free these past years. It was against this that I had every day to force with violence a passage for my work as a creative artist.

This letter of Thomas Mann's with its refusal to return to Germany at once and—as he put it—'to set myself up as the standard bearer of what seems to me at the present moment at any rate an entirely fictitious modern German movement', was the beginning of a storm of controversy in Germany. No doubt the problem of the emigrés and their return would have been worth a serious discussion. But those who proceeded to take the field against Thomas Mann were not the few real writers about whom I shall come to speak in a moment. Those who rushed into print were the typical literary pedants, of all shades and varieties, who wanted to go on playing the part of the bombastic 'Præceptor Germaniæ'—of course, where necessary, with the mere substitution of minus for plus and plus for minus. In the smallest provincial papers of Germany and Austria intellectual yokels rushed into print to express their disapproval of Thomas Mann or to take a sentimental 'everlasting farewell' of him. A novelist, Frank Thiess, set the dance going. He happened to be a friend of

that Erich Ebermayer whose curious double role we have already noticed. Thiess was the man who invented the catchword 'the inner emigration', into which, he said, he and the other favourite authors of the Hitler years had taken their flight. They were all, according to Thiess' account, secret emigrés, and although their books had brought them credit and cash, the internal suffering of their souls had really been indescribable, as they thought how powerless they were to ward off the inevitable fate of having to sign on as members of the Goebbels Chamber of Culture, and as they meditated the moral monstrosity of the Hitler regime. It is possible that some at any rate of the German writers did genuinely choose the path of this 'inner emigration'. But for the great majority of the writers who went on writing under Hitler it is no more than an excuse which has the benefit of being retrospective and quite unverifiable. An excuse which, by its very vagueness, only increases the moral and intellectual chaos inside Germany. And what is worst of all is this: the language of these new champions expresses, word for word and sentence for sentence, the same old divorce from reality.

Here is a typical example of this new form of the old verbal intoxication. It comes from the reply to Thomas Mann written by Frank Thiess;

We know not from what heights, nor from whose hands, the seed will fall, which is to make fruitful the German soil, but suffering also is seed and springs up transformed from the dying grain of wheat up to the light . . . A God, who led this people into the deepest hell of its history, will, at the hour which He has appointed for it, give this people the power to forge its own true countenance out of the molten glow of suffering.

A few German writers have sharply criticized this pseudo-metaphysical mush, and it may be worth noting that the most solidly realistic writing has come from Austrians. The Viennese essayist Alfred Polgar has devoted a satirical piece to the problem of the 'involuntary Hitler authors', which ends with the words:

All these artists of the Hitler Reich *had to*—*force majeure!*—enter the Literary Chambers, the Culture Chambers, the Theatre Chambers, or the Press Chambers. But I cannot bring myself to weep for them with all my heart. My sympathy is reserved for those who had to enter the Gas Chambers.

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If I am right in saying that the greatest need of German literature is to recover direct contact with reality, it may be of value to

point out the positive tendencies—unfortunately there are not so many—which are working in this direction. In two ways some German writers of the immediate past and present have been trying to recover this direct contact with reality: by consciously uniting themselves with the intellectual life of Western Europe, and by a real recovery of the German tradition (not a merely formal imitation of it, of the sort that was fashionable under Hitler). Here and there, both in Germany itself and among the emigrés, both these ways have been pursued.

Inside Germany, during Hitler's rule, it was the writers who had been trained in the Catholic world of thought who knew best how to keep themselves unfogged by the wild, subjective German mysticism. The most outstanding example was Theodor Haecker (who died last year), the translator of Kierkegaard, Cardinal Newman, Belloc and Francis Thompson; but not only a translator, also a first-class essayist on his own account. His writings *What Is Man?*, *On Paul Claudel*, and the last book he wrote, *Beauty*, are classical examples of a genuine 'inner emigration', genuinely European thinking, which was able to express itself without loss or corruption in the very heart of Hitler's Germany. The small circle round Haecker—which, incidentally, was the inspiration of the 1943 revolt of the Munich students—included the significant German woman novelist Gertrud von Le Fort, whose chief works before the war have been translated into English. A gifted lyric poet is Reinhold Schneider, whose sonnets were smuggled from hand to hand amongst the young opponents of the regime during the war. Schneider's poems always recur to the same theme—the transience of Hitler's kingdom and the permanence of the Kingdom of God. They are poems evidently conceived in genuine emotion, but not free from an archaic rigidity of form, which sometimes obscures the vivid reality of the idea, by an all-too-unreal vehicle of expression. The same defect strikes one in the writings of Ernst Juenger whose background of ideas is a very different one. His allegorical anti-Hitler novel *On the Marble Cliffs* (reviewed by John Lehmann in *New Writing and Daylight* in 1943) has a great idea and some truly prophetic passages. But what Juenger is trying to do is to exorcize the German people by casting out the Satan of Hitlerism by the Beelzebub of Militarism, which has led to his being black-listed among the banned authors in the American zone of Germany.



The Protestant theologian and poet Dietrich Bonhoeffer preserved the perfect unity of his life and his literary work, which made his end as inevitable as it was tragic. The direct, often naïve, lines of utterly convincing sincerity, which Bonhoeffer wrote, are his monument. Bonhoeffer took an active part in a movement aiming at Hitler's revolutionary overthrow. He was arrested for high treason in 1943, and finally murdered in the Flossenburg concentration camp shortly before the Allied armies reached it.

The literature of those who emigrated in the geographical as well as in the esoteric sense (at any rate as we see it in their most distinguished representatives) has the same double tendency—organic connection with the intellectual life of Europe, and at the same time the search for the lost tradition of Germany. Here the experience of personal exile, of wandering homeless from one land to another, however bitter and however tragic, has proved of crucial value for not a few German writers. I have mentioned the rejuvenation of Thomas Mann. There are many other examples. Suffice it here to mention some lyric poets in whose lines Western Europe and Germany meet in admirable harmony. Max Hermann-Neisse died in 1940 during the London Blitz. He has left two volumes of poems, many of them vivid descriptions of the English country-side, bombing nightmares, or evocations of loneliness experienced among London's millions. These are poems full of the solid reality of today, expressed in an absolutely natural language, the legitimate descendant of the nineteenth-century lyric poetry of Germany. Berthold Viertel, again, has given German form to matter from England and America. His collection of poems, *Fear No More*, contains work which will live; the lover addressing the German language as his mistress, even in the time of its deepest degradation; or the portrait of Shakespeare; or the memories of the poet's untroubled childhood in Vienna. Bert Brecht, lyric poet and playwright (who went to Hollywood and wrote the scenario for the Heydrich film, 'Hangmen also Die') showed pronounced English and American influence even before his emigration. His *Long Heads and Round Heads*, written while he was a refugee, is a modern paraphrase of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, a full-scale drama on the theme of the race question and politics in Hitler's Germany. Enrigno Beck, living in Switzerland, is a young and perhaps not yet very well-known

poet with a gift, tending to virtuosity, for painting word pictures in which Spanish and German landscapes are curiously combined.

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Will it be possible to fuse all these diverse forces, within the not too distant future, into an harmonious intellectual life in which all German writers can communicate with one another? Much will depend on outward circumstances, Germany's social conditions and the good sense of the Allied Control Commission. Very few books are being printed in Germany at present, for the paper shortage is extreme. In the Russian zone the available paper is taken up mostly by sociological and political works imported from Soviet Russia, in the Western zones by translations from English and American authors and reprints of the classical German hymns in honour of freedom. There is a considerable difference in the attitude of the different Allies towards discredited writers and artists who served Hitler. There is often even a diametrically opposite attitude between one zone and another. The quickest pardon for writers and actors was, a little surprisingly, in the Russian zone. There it seems that present political professions, no matter how recent, are considered more important than genuine convictions. For instance, the manager of the Berlin State Theatre under Hitler, Gustav Gruendgens, a man heavily compromised if ever there was one, has been restored to favour. It is in the American zone that the sieve has the finest mesh. In the British zone the authorities seem to be tackling a problem with a kind of gentle common sense; the compromised artists, after a short period of suspension, are permitted to work again, though as yet on a very small stage. In none of the zones is there any trace of a large, comprehensive conception. But there is no doubt that sooner or later (if only for political or security reasons) a single, comprehensive code and charter will have to be drawn up for all German writers. Without it there will be no escape from the indescribable literary chaos which we see today.



# LÉON KOCHNITZKY HENRI LAURENS

CAN we imagine a cubist statue in the middle of a square, in the very heart of a great city, in Times Square or Trafalgar Square, or at the side of St. Germain-des-Près? The Egyptian obelisks, stripped of their splendid magic and historical raiment, exiled in the continuous uproar of our century, what are they to our sensitiveness but cubist monuments?

*La sentinelle granitique,  
Gardiennne des éternités,  
Se dresse entre un faux temple antique  
Et la Chambre des Députés.*

Théophile Gautier, in this personification of '*la sentinelle granitique*', treats the obelisk as if it were the 'graven image' of a human being, a statue, not a symbolical form. Thus the poet's intuition discovers, in the late forties of the last century, this fundamental truth of modern aesthetics: that a geometrical form, even if it was seen by its creator as a non-figurative object, has the magic power of metamorphosis, and presents itself to the spectator's imagination as a statue, i.e. as a human or animal representation. Examples can be gathered from every period of our civilization. Pyramids, spheres, and more complex geometrical figures are to be found in the plastic arts of all cultures: from the mysterious pentahedron in Dürer's *Melancholia*, to the huge utilitarian or hedonistic constructions of the nineteenth century, like the Eiffel Tower, and the 'Big Wheel' that used to gyrate solemnly in the skies of London, Paris and Vienna. A cubist statue or any kind of non-figurative monument differs from these objects and constructions, in its voluntary purpose, in its technique and architecture. But the effect and action on the onlooker's understanding and imagination are very nearly the same. So that there is no reason to fear that the presence of such a sculpture or construction in the middle of a city square would scandalize our contemporaries or provoke their rebuke. The pylon and sphere of New York's World Fair in 1940—although very second-rate artistic creations—did not stir up public indignation and, on seeing them, none of the millions of visitors ever stopped to utter once more the idiotic question: What does it represent?

The work of a modern sculptor—whether a cubist statue or a surrealist composition, the product of fantasy and automatism—can be placed in the midst of the hurrying crowds, of the toiling human flocks, without need of pedestal or protective gate, in the same way as Rodin's *Bourgeois* who, surviving the ruined city are still standing on the market place of Calais. What has this to do with the intrinsic value of a creative work? And how could a creative artist be interested in a question of mere location? 'Shall my work stand in a street, or a public garden, on the façade of a court-house, on the top of a commercial building, or in a museum's gallery?' It is difficult to imagine such artists as Brancusi, Lipschitz, Csaky or Zadkine, Calder, Giacometti or Henry Moore, harassed and tormented by this problem. Some of them may sometimes have thought of it. I feel absolutely convinced that during the two score years of his career as a sculptor, Henri Laurens has never for a second indulged in a temporal care of that kind.

However, the problem is an important one.

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Sculpture stands to the plastic arts as theatre does to poetry. It is unquestionable that the significance of a statue is social because the form of a statue is inscribed in space, and takes its full meaning when surrounded by living beings or by other statues and because, unlike the greatest part of two-dimensional paintings, it is created to be enjoyed—or admired, or worshipped, or even deprecated—by several spectators at a time, and often by crowds and masses. Of course one could fancy a single man collecting sculptures, his aim being purely aesthetic, and estranged from archaeology or historical documentation. A *dilettante* of this kind would be akin to the Bavarian King, listening to the Wagnerian harmonies in the solitude of a dark and empty theatre.

In the winter of 1924 I remember visiting a private collection of sculptures of Prince Yussouppoff, which, together with his splendid marble palace on the embankment of the Neva, had recently been expropriated by the Soviet government. And how I was struck by the remark of the Leningrad official who was my guide: for the twenty-three years preceding the Revolution, the owner of these treasures (mostly antique) had never visited these *things of beauty*. Of course, in my guide's opinion, this was an excellent argument to justify the confiscation of these idle riches. But I knew what a



From *The Idylls of Theocritus*  
Editions Verve, Paris



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Frontispiece from *Lucius and the Ass*  
by Lucian of Samosata  
Editions Verve, Paris

refined and cultivated man Felix Yussouppoff was, and I could draw only one conclusion from this statement: how absurd it was to collect sculptures. Only one man, I think, can face the ordeal of contemplating a statue in his lonely home, and gain a full enjoyment, both spiritual and sensuous, from this contemplation: it is the sculptor himself, he who created—from clay and light and shade—this ‘graven image’, a new earthly being.

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In the field of plastic art, cubism has brought about the greatest revolution since Paolo Uccello and Piero della Francesca. However, despite their scientific and intellectual appearance, the discoveries made by the first cubist painters (1909–1911) were mostly based on a social and psychological complex. In his penetrating essay on Braque, Carl Einstein shows how the plastic researches of cubism originate in a scission of the personality, a supreme attempt of the artist to protect his individual freedom from the ever-encroaching waves of collective trends. On these crystal rocks the painter finds a refuge, inaccessible to the imperative call of the masses. There he shall again recover his romantic pride and, disciplined by his cubist language, inspiration will be his only faith and only law. One can easily realize the inner sterility of such an attitude; and also the reason why the period of strict obedience to cubism was so short. After two or three years of enthusiastic creativeness, the very prophets of the doctrine betrayed their own pandects, and returned to a more human conception of art. By 1915, Picasso’s canvases were pervaded with sensuous forms and colours. The fixed elements of cubist *nature-morte* came to a new life: glasses and fruit-dishes became dancers, the ace of clubs blossomed into a purple rose and the traditional bottle of Bass changed into a Harlequin. The painter had left for ever the cubist hermitage. He was back among his fellow men and women, among living and suffering human beings. But he was loaded with the treasures of a new discovered world.

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And now we come to the paradox of modern sculpture. How could this art, ‘created to be enjoyed by several spectators at a time’, have anything to do with cubism, with the art of the lonely, for the lonely, the art of the happy ONE, the art that rebukes the masses and scandalizes the crowd?

Many a talented artist has tried to solve the problem. With



boldness and fervour, with self-denial and self-sacrifice, despising the protest of the hypocrite and the mockery of the idiot, Brancusi, Archipenko, Csaky, Lipschitz and Zadkine have toiled for nearly forty years. Although their art has little or nothing to do with cubist orthodoxy, Calder, Henry Moore, Giacometti are, on an ethical ground, the successors of these great creators. They can now follow a path in the wilderness, a trend in the jungle. However, of all these artists, pioneers, followers and newcomers, none has so deeply felt, so totally lived, so triumphantly surpassed the experience of modernism in sculpture, as the Frenchman Henri Laurens.

He was twenty-eight when, in 1912, he was first struck by the cubist canvases of Picasso, Braque, Juan Gris and their companions. And he immediately started to translate into a tri-dimensional expression all the plastic and poetic innovations of cubism. Let us remember the state of sculpture in France in those remote days. To the young and the wise, to the *élite* of connoisseurs and critics, Rodin was the prophet and the master. Rodin still remains in the eyes of our generation as a creator of immortal works, a kind of frenetic Michelangelo roving through the desolate shores of an industrialized age. Rodin was, in the full meaning of the word, a romantic. His aesthetics and belief are not very different from those of Eugène Delacroix. The same can be said of his less-gifted follower, Bourdelle. So that the evolution of sculpture appeared as somewhat belated, compared with the prodigious development of painting in the age of Cézanne and Matisse. The actual *décalage* was in the temporal order of seventy years! Nothing in sculpture could be presented as a reflexion of impressionism. The small statuettes of Degas, as well as the few existing sculptures of Renoir, were thought of as the works of amateurs, taking fun on their *violon d'Ingres*. A great, an authentic master, Maillol, and also Despiau and Pompon, little known to the Parisian *coteries* of the day, were creating their work in retirement, in the same way as Paul Valéry chiselled his verse, *procul negotiis*. However, Maillol's classical vision was, and remained till the end, estranged from the agitations of our century. He may have been an unsurpassed representative of French tradition; he walked in the midst of his contemporaries as a stranger. This was sculpture in France in 1910. No use in mentioning the hideous pageantry of Academical sculptors, and their insignificant marble and bronze



nightmares, standing at every corner of the Paris streets, many of them destroyed by the invader: a vandalism over which, in this case, and strangely enough, too many tears must not be shed. In this atmosphere of academism and late romanticism, the first sculpted works of Henri Laurens were born. There can exist no metre to measure the intensity of a creative effort; but if we consider the birth of cubism as a logical consequence of Cézannes' 'clearing' of pictorial values and of the 'Fauves' appreciation of volumes, we shall recognize that the painter's task was, if not less revolutionary, at least much easier than the sculptor's. To help him in his audacious attempt, Henri Laurens had only the example of the cubist painters, and the encouragement of *avant-garde* writers such as Apollinaire and Raynal, and also the precarious assistance of an enlightened but not wealthy art-dealer, Léonce Rosenberg. And his faith in his vision. And his genius.

It is too late, or perhaps too early, to decide the question of 'priority', in painting as well as in sculpture. Picasso, Braque or even Derain? Laurens, Archipenko or Brancusi? Who was the discoverer of the technique, the first to achieve a work in the *dolce stil nuovo*? A definitive answer will probably be given to these problems in a few decades, when all personal and passionate arguments will be silenced. At least, we may say that Henri Laurens's very first cubist statues were so different from every other carved or moulded object seen before them, that they certainly represent a milestone in the evolution of art.

Following the same technical process as the cubist painter, Laurens proceeds to dissociate the forms into polyhedric constructions resembling the formation of crystals. However, these crystals, when represented on the canvas, had often the aspect of scientific diagrams and designs, in which the part entrusted to light and shade was merely illustrative. In the sculpture of Laurens, on the other hand, the opacity of plaster gave an extraordinary importance to every facet of the work. According to their position in the space, these facets were alternately bright or dark, luminous or absorbent. And the whole composition was transformed into a mysterious diamond, irradiating light from within, *la lumière rayonnant de l'objet même*, to use the artist's words.

Henri Laurens, even in these early days of theoretical research, never conceived a purely abstract work. All his statues are the expression of an initial emotional state, focused on a determinate

object or being (*émotion objective*). In this he stands nearer to the position of his friends the cubist painters than to the purely conceptual activity of Brancusi, or later, Lipschitz. Whilst these great creators aim at an extreme stylization of the forms and at their simplification into elementary geometrical solids (cylinder, sphere), Laurens, grounded in a fundamental return to reality, achieves a disintegration of the same forms, in which the spectator, through an emotional process, and with the help of light and shade, rediscovers the primordial shape, transformed, transfigured, metamorphosed. His art operates a real *Epiphany of the object*.

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A certain parallel exists between the development of cubist painting and the sculpture of Henri Laurens. To the polyhedric constructions of the first cubist canvases of Picasso and Braque, correspond—some four or five years later—the transposition in the space of these same constructions by Laurens. Around 1915, the sculptor translated into his own beautiful language the still-lives of the second phase of cubism: the fruit-dish and the bottle and the guitar. At the same time, and under the influence of the first *papiers collés*, he inaugurated the series of his polychromatic sculptures, making a frequent use of unexpected metallic and wooden material, thus prefiguring sometimes the *ready-made* objects of Marcel Duchamp. But the polychromatic ‘heads’ or *portraits* of this period demonstrate a greater originality, both in technique and invention. They are huge blocks of stone, in which plane facets are cut, according to the cubist vision; several of the facets being painted in one or more colours while others preserve the ‘complexion’—if one may say so—of the carved stone.

These blocks of stone are heads, and these heads are portraits. It has been a constant preoccupation of the cubist painters to render the aspect of human personality and individuality without betraying their system. One must confess that their success was rather incomplete and precarious. The great polychromatic heads of Laurens, the portrait in red and black (1915), another one in black and yellow (1915), and quite a few more are, in my opinion, the most perfect achievement of cubism in its attempt to escape from the algebraical fatality and the anonymous figuration.

These portraits, however, could no more satisfy entirely the



HENRI LAURENS  
Océanide  
Plaster. 1933



L'Espagnole  
Bronze  
1939









Sirène. 1945

fervid creativeness of Henri Laurens than the faithful translation into spatial reality of the cubist still-life. Picasso and Braque initiate their retreat from cubist orthodoxy as early as 1914. Laurens begins to move away from the world of his 'constructions' around 1919. But his reasons are different from those of his companions. Henceforth, he will follow his own direction. As Christian Zervos puts it, Laurens relinquishes '*les attirances auxquelles sa distinction naturelle s'est refusée, les effets faciles dont il s'est tôt défié*'.<sup>1</sup> He aims at simplicity, soberness, moderation. He never forgets the lesson of cubism. But in his last 'constructions' of 1918, he reaches a precise conception of the meaning of volumes and light. '*Ses modèles sont comme terminés de toutes parts en même temps que très sensibles*'.<sup>2</sup>

The pioneers of modern sculpture, Archipenko and Brancusi, will—after the years of *Sturm und Drang*—retire to the desert. Their creativeness has come to an end. On the other hand, Zadkine, Lipschitz, Csaky, Chana Orloff, and several more will continue to work in the path they cleared in the jungle of new aesthetics. At the apex of their glorious career, Zadkine's *Le Phœnix* and Lipschitz's *Prométhée* will appear as the fulfilment of the promises of youth. The trends that inspired their early works come to a splendid achievement in these masterpieces. The fate of Henri Laurens is completely different. We already said he was never to forget the lesson of cubism. For more than twenty-five years he has learned to abandon his natural and innate brilliancy, he has given away the treasures of his imagination and the secrets of his *trouvailles*. The raiment of his statues fell at their feet like the gown of a bather. *ANADYOMENE*: all his artistic work since 1919 could bear this inscription.

The reasons given by Mr. Zervos to this radical mutation are certainly valid. But I think that another fact, independent from the artist's will, is also to be considered.

We do not believe, as a matter of principle, in a national or racial predestination. However, the fact that Henri Laurens, among all sculptors influenced or inspired by cubism, should be—with the other exception of Duchamp-Villon—the only one to be French-born, cannot be neglected. This does not confer upon him

<sup>1</sup>Christian Zervos—'Les Constructions de Laurens', in *Cahiers d'Art*, 1930, No. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

some kind of particular *grâce d'état*. But he is, since his first awakening to the world of art, confronted with a millennial tradition, an unavoidable reality: that of French art. This has nothing to do with academism, still less with nationalism. Neither does it imply a sentimental or spiritual preference for French ways and manners. It is a purely instinctive trend, that impels and incites the French artist to reconduct every novelty or innovation, even the most provocative, even the most exotic, into the limits of French comprehension and sensitiveness. This comprehension, this sensitiveness find their expression in the two French words *le style* and *le goût* (little to do with style or taste).

If we compare the evolution of Picasso's works from year to year, to the development of Braque during the same period, we shall be able to appreciate—in the latter's paintings—the grandeur and also the limitations imposed on the French artist by both *style* and *goût*. The same 'prime mover' can be observed—with different effects—in the works of La Fresnaye; and even in the Surrealist paintings of Tanguy (compared to the works of Ernst and Miro).

In the case of Henri Laurens, both *style* and *goût* were hidden Muses, inspiring the sculptor and guiding his hand, in a somewhat unconscious and prophetic way. This was not sufficiently apparent, from the beginning, to seduce that portion of the French critics and art-lovers, who seek above all the permanence of traditional values (Maillol and Despiau gave them more satisfaction). But it was quite enough to estrange Laurens from the social and artistic activities of all other sculptors and painters (with the exception of Braque) who had been touched by the cubist revolutionary influence. Now we may fully realize why the greatest French sculptor of his age spent the years of his youth and maturity, if not in absolute retirement, at least very aloof from glory, official recognition, wealth and success. Silently, obstinately, with 'iron hands and patient heart' he was creating the work of his genius. He was happy, surrounded by the affection of his wife and son. In Madame Henri Laurens, he found treasures of intelligent help, of lucid understanding, of encouragement and admiration. It is extremely rare that a woman should be, to such a degree, associated in her husband's creative work. One should not imagine that Laurens' talent was not acknowledged by many of his contemporaries. In 1937, he was commissioned by the National

Manufacturers of Sèvres to execute two statues for the façade of the Sèvres pavilion at the Paris World Fair, and in 1937 a jury, composed of the best artists and critics of the day, awarded him an important prize founded by Madame Helena Rubinstein.

However, now, the *mondan rumor*, as Dante puts it, repeats to all echoes the name of Henri Laurens. Flocks of admirers, coming from every part of the world, pass the threshold of the little cottage in Villa Brune, and walk silently through the tiny garden, where some of the artist's finest statues have their home. Laurens, now sixty-two, is the modest and rather sceptical witness of his own triumph. He has experienced the vanity of artistic judgements and knows how they change from one decade to another. He can contemplate with pride the pageant of his beautiful statues. A quarter of a century ago, he re-discovered *l'unité de la matière et la pauvreté des moyens*. From this unity, from this poverty, an immense work is born, a gigantic creation has been achieved. The discoveries and inventions of cubism of the heroic period of the 'constructions' have not been lost nor wasted. They have been assimilated, disciplined, metamorphosed into something magnificent and everlasting. *L'Océanide* (1933), *L'Espagnole* (1939), *La Sirène* (1945) reach a perfect equilibrium of plastic values, of emptiness and fullness, of air and light and shade. In them, the poverty of means is equal to the splendour of the figure, to the ideal curve of shapes and contours. They are classic, in the sense that they are not necessarily located in time and space. Each of them could stand on the *Place de la Concorde* and attain its unrivalled grandeur. Each of them could be enthroned in the middle of a pool in the park of Versailles, without being anachronistic or losing its touching gracefulness.

It was inevitable that the spirit of ancient Greece should appeal to Henri Laurens. A few years ago, during a long illness that kept him in bed for several months, he made an unforgettable series of woodcuts illustrating the *Idylls* of Theocritus. Another set of drawings for Lucian's *Lucius and the Ass* is in course of publication.

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The Committee which plans to erect a monument to Max Jacob, has commissioned Henri Laurens. The sculptor has moulded a thunder-struck archangel, lying dead, his face turned down towards the steps of the architecture. It has the sad and gentle grace of the dead poet's verse, something also of his

tender and ironical melancholy, in the folded wings falling along the little angel's body. The monument will stand in a provincial street of Quimper, in Brittany, Max Jacob's native town. During his lifetime, Max Jacob, one of the greatest lyrical souls of this century, was held for a delightful *fantaisiste*. He died in the concentration camp at Drancy. The dead angel of Henri Laurens will lie, humble in his modernity, beautiful in his classical immortality, as a double testimony—for Max Jacob and for Henri Laurens—of the frailty of Man's judgement and the precariousness of his doctrines.

## TANGYE LEAN

### A STUDY OF TOYNBEE

THE author of a great book often takes a more obvious physical imprint from his thought than Arnold Toynbee has done. By the end of the last war his lean and distinguished appearance might have classed him as one of those elder officials of the Foreign Office in whom acquaintance with policy has heightened reserve into a dominant character trait. His geniality in conversation, and the smile of his grey-green eyes, had a touch of unreality; underneath seemed to lie something like foreboding, or at least anxiety of the kind which had slightly disordered his sparse white hair. But if the visitor had left his impressions at that, he would have been unable to account for the subtle and pervasive current of strength running unexpectedly through him to wake his finely shaped hands into clear, incisive gestures. And if our visitor left the Foreign Office with an afterthought about Arnold Toynbee's hands, he might suddenly have realized that they were an artist's hands, or perhaps even a prophet's—and that would, probably, have been the end of his attempt to form a coherent picture.

Born eleven years before the end of the nineteenth century, Arnold Toynbee grew up in an atmosphere which had the authority of permanence. The Bible, the study of history and the classics were its foundations. Gibbon contributed if not urbanity, at least a certain sense of breadth and ease. He won a scholarship to Winchester, where he read the classical set-pieces, including Thucydides, with the concentration and lack of disturbing insight



that set-pieces demand. By now he had learned to express his feelings in Greek elegiac verse, and from Winchester he won a classical scholarship to Balliol. In Edwardian Oxford he extended his reading, solidified his landmarks, and won the appropriate degree for classical examinations passed with orthodox brilliance. To this his College added a Fellowship; but before he took it up on the eve of the first world war he had two important experiences.

The year in which Toynbee graduated saw the works of Bergson, delayed by translation, sweep into Oxford in an abrupt and surprising flood. They came to Toynbee's own intellectual world 'with the force', he has said, 'of a revelation'. And what was revealing was not simply the intelligibility of a universe dissected with French clarity and Jewish intuition: Bergson claims that there are two automatic distortions in our thinking about life: we protect ourselves from the continuously disintegrating and re-forming flux which is its reality by isolating out the 'present moment' and static 'periods' from the past. The habit has been forced on humanity by preoccupation with a bare living to be earned from the rearrangement of dead objects. But the consequent mechanical 'cramp' of minds which have successfully tackled the material world with a technique of isolation and abstraction is misplaced in considering life itself, where to be realistic we need the help of evolution, psychology and our deepest intuitions.

Bergson points in fact to chasms of assumption beneath the floor of the nineteenth century; his philosophy gives Toynbee his first coherent picture of impermanence, and spreads out later like a kind of dye in his mind, influencing his sense of values, suggesting clues for further research, colouring even his style of exposition. If direct quotations from *L'Evolution Créatrice* itself are rare—twenty, or thirty, or forty years later in *A Study of History*, it is because the book has fused into the whole structure of Toynbee's thought.

At the end of 1911—he was now twenty-two—he went for a nine-month tour of Greece, travelling on foot in Crete and the Athos Peninsula, as well as among the inland areas. Once, as he turned the corner of a mountain at the eastern end of Crete, he tumbled on the ruins of an eighteenth-century villa built by a Venetian grandee just before the hold of Venice on the island

gave way to the Turks'. Analysing the strange sensation he had as he successfully 'placed' the building, he realized that although this was a piece of modern western architecture, built here by western hands, it seemed precisely as dead, as remote less than two centuries after its demise, as the Minoan palaces at Cnossos and Phæstus which he had been inspecting a few days previously. So 'thalassocrats', he reflected in his Anglo-Greek terminology, shared death in common when separated by three thousand years, and verses ran through his head—as verses and classifications regularly jostle for position in him at moments of historical emotion. For mortality was here at its most impressive when over a vast period,

in due time, one by one,

Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as  
well undone,

Death came tacitly and took them where they never see the  
sun.

But Browning had by now brought nineteenth-century England to his mind, aligning a third 'thalassocracy' with the others; for if Venice had managed to keep her grip on Crete for four and a half centuries, that was at any rate longer than his own country had yet ruled over the earliest of her dominions. He felt a chill in the atmosphere of his baroque ruin; it was a *memento mori* for Britannia as much as for the Doge and Minos.

He had to be back at Oxford for the Michaelmas Term, but there was time to bring with him more than the tremendous confirmation which first-hand experience of a culture always gives to its admiring student. The conversations he overheard in Greek cafés about the foreign policy of Sir Edward Grey gave him the beginnings of a sense of political relativity; and as he watched the Balkans lining up for war (he was himself arrested as a spy for crossing a viaduct), as he saw the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Army dawdling in uniforms cut to the mode of 1848 and dyed with the blacks and ethereal blue of the Quattrocento, he again felt a hint below the surface of the changes prepared by time.

Back in the quietness of Balliol, he took up his Fellowship, specialized in Ancient History, and a year later married a daughter of Gilbert Murray. In another year the war had broken out, and he left his studies for the first long immersion of five years in

practical work for the Government. Editing a Blue Book under the direction of Lord Bryce, working on Turkish affairs in one intelligence Department after another—this kind of experience, shared since then by so many intellectuals, had its profound effect on Toynbee, but was less immediately decisive than the fact of the war.

It was in March 1918, as the Third and Fifth British Armies were cut down by fifty German divisions, that the sense of an impending collapse of Western civilization reached its height; and now Thucydides and Lucretius, whom he constantly re-read, were big with a meaning that he had not seen when they were academic texts. So war in the fifth century B.C. had 'eaten away the margins of ordinary life'; so Lucretius, writing more than a century after Hannibal's invasion, knew precisely the emotional reference of the individual confronted by a succession of mass offensives:

*Nil igitur mors est ad nos neque pertinet hilum.*

'I shall never forget', he writes in 1921, 'how those lines kept running in my head.' And the thought that had begun to form in him outside the Venetian grandee's villa in Crete took a more definite shape. In the historians of the nineteenth century there must have been something radically inaccurate—their vision of history as a single track mounting, with dips and loops, but mounting purposefully to the heights on which we lived, must have been as distorted by unreflecting egotism as accounts of the solar system before Galileo and Copernicus, or of zoology before Darwin. An enormous, unperceived 'egocentric illusion' had been at work, feeding on industrial and democratic assumptions less obvious to ourselves, but quite as misleading as the military and administrative bias of the Latin historians or the pyramid-tharaonic horizon of the Egyptians. And if, almost overnight, Thucydides and Lucretius could be recognized as contemporaries instead of ancestors rigidified in a remote point of time, did this not open up the possibility of a revolutionary and more complex approach to history?

But one more turn was needed to the screw prising up the foundations of a nineteenth-century education before Toynbee could face the task which a break-up would impose on him personally. First the smoke of war had to clear, and that process

seemed to be happening in the optimism of the Peace Conference as it assembled in Paris with himself buried in the Middle East Section of the British Delegation. In a more desolate sense, but perhaps more lucidly than anywhere else (with the possible exception of Spengler's *Decline of the West*, which Toynbee had not yet read) the smoke of war had already cleared in Valéry's post-war essays.<sup>1</sup> Here, with a poet's brevity and the immaculate logic of a mathematician, we are shown the culture of the West as a doomed liner from which we can see the wrecks of previous vessels scattered on the ocean floor, and see them no longer with the blasé curiosity of sightseers but as passengers on a sister-ship whose sirens have just announced that we shall join them.

A curious and lovable detail which we must notice in Toynbee's mind at this turning point is his devotion to maps and time-tables. There are maps showing exactly where he found himself in Greece and Turkey between January and September 1921, or setting out on a smaller scale his journey to Japan *via* Constantinople and back by the trans-Siberian railway. Psychologists would diagnose this as a defence, like the learning of foreign languages, against a threatened loss of security, and they would no doubt make this diagnosis the more confidently on noting his behaviour at (say) 12 a.m. on 22 January 1930, at Omsk. Here and at that

<sup>1</sup> The opening passage of *Variété* invites comparison with some sentences in Toynbee's survey *The World After the Peace Conference*:

Nous autres, civilisations, nous savons maintenant que nous sommes mortelles. Nous avons entendu parler de mondes disparus tout entiers, d'empires coulés à pic avec tous leurs hommes et tous leurs engins. . . . Nous apercevions à travers l'épaisseur de l'histoire les fantômes d'immenses navires qui furent chargés de richesse et d'esprit. *Nous ne pouvions pas les compter.* Mais ces naufrages après tout n'étaient pas notre affaire. Elam, Ninive, Babylone étaient de beaux noms vagues et la ruine totale de ces mondes avait aussi peu de signification pour nous que leur existence même. Mais France, Angleterre, Russie, ce seraient aussi de beaux noms. Lusitania aussi est un beau nom.<sup>2</sup> Et nous voyons maintenant que l'abîme de l'histoire est assez grand pour tout le monde. *Variété*, by Paul Valéry (Claude Aveline, Paris; 1926. The essay was first published in the *Athenæum*, in April 1919), pp. 5-6.

In 1914 educated persons in the West were, of course, aware that other great civilizations had gone down to destruction. The fall of the Roman Empire was the familiar background of Western Society itself; and for a century past, the enterprise of Western archaeologists had been bringing to light, in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Crete, Central Asia, and Yucatan, the magnificent remains of civilizations so utterly cut off that their scripts had become extinct and their very names forgotten. . . . The general proposition that not only individuals but societies are mortal might be admitted by the rational Western intellect, but how could this apply in practice to the apparently triumphant vitality of Western civilization on the eve of the war? . . . By January 1920 the picture had changed.

*The World after the Peace Conference*, by Arnold J. Toynbee (Oxford University Press; 1924), pp. 87-8.



moment he takes out his pocket-map with a greater need of support than in England (where his habit is still dogged enough to incur the ridicule of his family), for he finds against his hopes that Omsk is actually further east than Bombay, and to argue, as he does, that the degrees of latitude 'are paraded in less open order' in the north than at the Equator, is a comfort which deadens but quite fails to cure the disorder he feels at still being in the wilderness eight days from his goal of Victoria Station.

We need not pursue other examples of Toynbee's resort to maps to imagine his reaction on seeing, whether through Valéry or his own sufficiently prepared eyes, this vision of a doomed liner listing towards the hulks of earlier wrecks. *Nous ne pouvions pas les compter*, writes Valéry, we were unable to count them; but thanks to an industrious generation of archaeologists the count had now become possible. It was, of course, the least of the possibilities in this situation that struck Toynbee. What was needed after a count was a reconstruction of the courses before shipwreck, an analysis of the crucial errors which sent them down, a sorting out to discover whether it was the same kind of reef they had all struck. A chart of this kind could do two things: it could give an indication, but perhaps no more, of the point in our own course which we had reached; more certainly by ringing round the fatal errors, it could tell us what corrections to make to our course—if there was still time to make any—before we joined the forerunners who had gone blindly down.

It is fair to present the genesis of *A Study of History* in this purposive light. Besides being a man of his generation impatient at the sterilities of detached academicism, Toynbee is profoundly a moralist and Christian, determined in a crisis to help his fellow-men. One can see this peeping through the reserve of his private life when, for instance, as a young man investigating the minorities crisis in the Near East, he struggles on the Yalova jetty south of Constantinople for the lives of refugees from Greek terrorism, moved beyond bearing by that typical atrocity of our age, the official order which drags a family into separation from its father or husband. Faced by the more massive threat of a collapse in civilization, his desire is to save his fellow-men alive if possible, and to save their souls if it is not.

He differs rather unexpectedly from many scholars who have mastered a mass of facts, for the process of mastery gives insight



into trends which shape the material, and the more concentration is focused on these trends the more completely does the specialist believe in their power, until he is forced to the conclusion that they are all-powerful and his universe an automatic mechanism. The attitude finds its climax in Spengler's statement that the collapse of the West 'is obligatory and insusceptible of modification . . . our choice is between willing this and willing nothing at all'. But in Toynbee an opposite tendency can be traced.<sup>1</sup> As a young man, enthusiastic at discovering patterns common to the Hellenic world and our own, he is inclined to believe them inevitable, to hint even at the possibility of a morphology of civilizations (which is what Spengler produces). On reflection and after research Toynbee becomes cautious; he recognizes the virtual impossibility of prediction in human affairs—even though he remains tempted to try it; he learns from the psychologists that 'cures', which amount to restorations of freedom, are achieved by a conscious recognition and mastery of tendencies which control the neurotic only in so far as they are unrecognized by him. Above all, as his personal religion gains strength, which it appears to do in the six published volumes of *A Study of History*, he insists on the freedom of the human soul to decide its own destiny. Today it is no longer caution which dominates Toynbee, but a positive demand that we should accept responsibility for the fate of our civilization. In religious terms, his function in handing a map to the ship's company on the eve of disaster is to give them more clearly their freedom of choice.

At the age of thirty-three, as he jotted down the plan of the book on half a sheet of notepaper, Toynbee realized that it could scarcely work out at less than two million words, or about twice the length of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which took Gibbon twenty years. With the research into the data of the

<sup>1</sup> 1921 (Article on History in *The Legacy of Greece*): 'Societies like individuals are living creatures, and may therefore be expected to exhibit the same phenomena'.

1939 (*A Study of History*, vol. IV): ' . . . societies are not, in fact, living organisms in any sense . . . ' (summarizing conclusions already reached in vol. III, 1934).

In the three volumes of *A Study of History*, published in 1934, Toynbee's 'social laws' are expounded less tentatively and with fewer reservations than in the volumes published in 1939. In the latter the word 'law' is scarcely ever used in this context without quotation marks.

known civilizations, he might with the utmost determination hope to finish it in his old age, sometime in the nineteen fifties, assuming always that catastrophe had not overtaken us. There were other personal problems, such as a living to be earned for his family, and a reputation to be lost—no negligible sacrifice—among orthodox historians who would feel themselves challenged by the undermining of their traditions.

A further difficulty almost doubled the effect of the rest. Just as his thought, as we noticed in Crete, is profoundly imbued with a relativity which demands concentration at the same moment on two or more points widely separated in time, so in his life from the first world war onwards we find alternating activities and interests which have needed superb co-ordination to prevent a collapse from overloading. In an article in *The Nation and Atheism* in 1929, he describes a hunt in Tokyo for the top hat which was *de rigueur* for the Imperial Chrysanthemum Party. His pursuit culminates in the necessity of intercepting an unknown man with hat-boxes, who would enter the hotel by any one of three separate doors through which continuous streams of people were already passing. It was a problem which might have flustered the moosthest of detectives, but Toynbee decides

‘to take up a position from which the outside three-quarters of either eye divergently commanded each of the two side doors, leaving the two inner quarters to converge upon the central entrance (a contorted but effective kind of squint); and there I waited, more intent and alert than a tiger awaiting its prey. . . .’

With later complications, which are as inevitable as his success, this solution gets him his top hat, and is not dissimilar either in technique or drive, from his pursuit of truth.

Toynbee has used three separate ‘eyes’ to find the data for *A Study of History*. The first, a traveller’s eye, has contributed little direct material; very few of the hints quoted in this note on Toynbee’s development can be found in *A Study of History*, which the naïve reader overlooking one or two references might take for the work of a scholar-recluse. In fact, the sense of live bone and issue which Toynbee conveys in a dozen different civilizations could only be given by someone who had spent several years in contact with them; nor, if he had remained in the West, could he have shed so completely the perspective of his fellow historians

who see little more than Egypt and 'the Unchanging East' beyond our own civilization and its ancestors. Toynbee has spent most time in Greece, studying the Hellenic, and in Turkey the Ottoman Societies; but he has also managed a bird's-eye view of the Near East generally for (according to his classification) the Islamic, Syriac, Iranic, Babylonian and Hittite Societies; he has travelled in Crete on foot among the faint shadows of the Minoan Society, visited Japan, Korea and China for the Far Eastern Society, India for the Hindu Society, and most cursorily of all, Russia for the Orthodox Christian Society. Articles written at high pressure in the trains have helped to pay his passage.

His second 'eye', which he did not allow to droop, gave him automatically as a member of the Western Society a view of a civilization still living out some phase of its existence. Since the first world war ejected him from Oxford to survey the contemporary scene, he has done this continuously from choice, editing and largely writing with his own hand the massive annual volumes of *The Survey of International Affairs* for Chatham House, and publishing several minor studies on particular areas of international relations which interested him.

On his return from the Paris Peace Conference of 1946, which concluded his second long bout of war work, he began the editorship of a history of the second world war. The writing-up of all this material has already been considerably longer than *A Study of History*, but the use of it as a measuring rod against which other societies can be laid was essential to Toynbee's method.

There has been a third 'eye' and this, researching directly into the fabric of a score of civilizations other than our own, must have borne a greater strain than its colleagues. One is overcome sometimes in reading *A Study of History* by a kind of defensive dizziness which is not so much intellectual confusion, because Toynbee writes with clarity, as the fatigue of a sightseer who is in need of a rest from revelations which come too thick and fast. To select this material Toynbee must have had to be selective, to pick his way where the indications unmistakably led, and his determination must have had to be all the greater while holding two professorships, first in Byzantine and Modern Greek Language, Literature and History, and then in International History, as Research Professor, at London University. At the same time he has worked as Director of Studies at Chatham House.

But in its essentially individual nature, Toynbee's masterpiece is a contrast to the 'joint-stock' products, encyclopaedias and Cambridge Histories, which have been the work of many hands, and when all allowance has been made for the devotion of his wife and other helpers, the mere making of this book suggests that it will live as an example of human endurance and achievement stretched, on its particular plane, to the limit. If we take the crucial difficulty—the sheer length and scope to which at the age of thirty-three he decides to sacrifice his life—what unnerves us is that it is self-imposed. Toynbee has a diviner's intuition of his own strength; he accepts burdens which he can carry, but only just carry; it is the virtually impossible that seduces him. 'To spin straw into gold thread,' he protests, 'to separate grain from chaff without a winnowing fan, and all the other impossible demands that are made upon the ingenuity of the heroines in fairy-stories, would not be more difficult than the task that now confronted me.' The task here was to acquire the top hat for the Chrysanthemum Party, but it might have been the establishment of Mr. Nairn's trans-desert bus service to Baghdad, or the goal of Constantinople considered from a Ford on an ox-track of the Great Balkan: provided only that it is possible, he will start bravely out, apprehensive of failure ('Would the poor thing ever start up? And should we lose our way and not have the energy to find it again?'), but as secretly exultant as when in footnotes to the first volume of *A Study of History*, he refers ahead to sections more than a million words before they have been written.

We must notice, too, that while Toynbee welcomes a burden which he himself accepts at the risk of breaking his back, he takes prompt avoiding action from the blind external threat. Thus he accepts the calculable risks attached to the writing of his masterpiece, but discreetly, at the Munich Conference of 1938, sends the notes for the unwritten volumes to New York.

We conclude that the enormous difficulties to which Toynbee submits himself play a positive, 'enabling' role; they liberate his creative power. But we cannot leave them at that. As a Christian, he is deeply aware of the significance of suffering in the New Testament, but again as a Christian he would not accept as complete an account of it which limited the consequent Redemption to individual terms or even to the earthly fate of a civilization. St. Augustine, who began to write *De Civitate Dei* after the sack



of Rome by Alaric, and died while the Vandals encircled the walls of Hippo around him, was the instrument of something greater than himself; for personalities, in Toynbee's view, who have 'succeeded in attaining self-determination through self-mastery find in the act that they cannot live and cannot die unto themselves'; however impossible their mission—even if it is to convert a species to a new way of life, which would mean the creation of movement where, by definition, there is a halt—they cannot rest until they have achieved the purpose for which they were sent into the world.

We can now proceed to analyse *A Study of History*,<sup>1</sup> but with the rider that a book of this length, planned to its own proportions, must inevitably dissolve in summary to an echo blurred by absence of complexity and depth—thereby sadly illustrating one of Toynbee's 'laws' on the effects of the diffusion of culture.

★                      ★                      ★

The screen has enlarged and become immense; that is our impression if we come in in the middle. Around the standard-sized screen the darkness has been chased back in all directions at once, revealing live areas where we had known at most a name. Then the camera chooses, perhaps from the conventional high road of history, a significant detail like the drawing of a sword, holds it in close-up, and then another detail of the same species, and then another—a Pope takes the sword, a Spartan, an Assyrian, a Manchu; as the reel unwinds we notice that this repeated act is pregnant with events we had perhaps half suspected but failed, within our limited field of sight, to recognize with certainty. We realize next that this is not simply an instructional film which deals with unrelated facts 'of general interest'—it has a plot: the destiny of civilizations, their birth, growth, breakdown and collapse.

However unprovocatively one might choose to describe a method of historical exposition like this (and Toynbee does not fight shy of the word 'scenario'), the dismay of conservative historians would be assured. We have already noticed in watching the growth of Toynbee's mind his break with certain fundamental

<sup>1</sup> Less than a third of *A Study of History* is still in note form. Volumes I to III were first published in 1934 and volumes IV to VI in 1939. A version in one volume, abridged by D. C. Somervell and revised by Arnold J. Toynbee, is due from the Oxford University Press shortly.



traditions of contemporary historicism; we must now give his reasons for three more immediate breaks which, added to the rest, distinguish the technique we have just been witnessing from what we may call the straight historical film. The size of screen we have been used to is the National size (the titles, *A History of the English People*, *A History of the United States*, *A History of France*, *The Italian Renaissance*), but this concept 'National', which has come, symptomatically, to mean a standard product, is unsuited in its restrictive and vainglorious effects to the study of history, as we see at once if we reduce it to the scale of, say, Portugal or Belgium, for these small States are, like ours, simply the interdependent members of a particular civilization and cannot be considered in isolation, even in their larger sizes. The revolutionary screen is therefore essential, if only to keep in perspective the egocentric illusions of modern nationalism.

A second novelty is subject-matter transcending the familiar periods of historicism, such as the wars of Napoleon and the Ptolemaic Dynasties, with State archives and other plentiful sources of evidence. Now these established periods have, in fact, been so arbitrarily chosen, are so remote even from utilitarian considerations of the obvious kind, that we may suspect the scholar has not first asked himself (in Toynbee's wording): 'Is Ptolemaic Egypt the most interesting and important phenomenon in the particular age of the particular society to which it belonged?', but instead and without noticing the colour he takes from his industrial surroundings: 'What is the richest mine of unworked material in this field?' But it is, of course, intolerable that our historical research should be governed, like our industry, by the amount and disposition of raw materials; we should choose according to its importance and our need of enlightenment.

Finally, the Toynbee scenario is startling in its abandonment of the pre-relativist time-scale where the story unfolded on a single plane—an arrangement which forbade an act of Napoleon's, for instance, to be seriously compared with another of Tiglath-Pileser's, or the mental attitude of the conquistadores. But here the cinema metaphor is on Toynbee's side, for it is plainly (in the cinema just as much as in modern science) at least as strange to restrict ourselves to a single time-scale and thus automatically exclude from view any event outside a fictitious 'mainstream of Civilization', as if there had been only one civilization. Toynbee

protests that some of the most important stages in history have been left unexplored in this way—the universal state of the Guptas in India, for example, and the fate of the Syriac Society after it had performed the momentous act of fertilizing the proletariat of the Hellenic Society with Christianity. And in reply, finally, to the objection that the facts of history are unique events which cannot be compared, Toynbee grants they are unique in many respects, but insists they are comparable in so far as they are members of a class; anthropology, for instance, is dependent on such limited comparisons. And Toynbee caps his argument with a charming analogy. Insurance firms, who deal in the lives of unique human beings, succeed in making a profit from their comparative study of events within a civilization, and scholars need not hesitate ‘in this adventure, at any rate’, to scorn the businessman’s lead.

Taking for granted the peculiarities of Toynbee’s screen, let us watch it give an over-all view of the position now reached by social Man. In front of us is a precipice whose sheer rock offers no respite to climbers except a ledge, with figures already lying on it. These prostrate figures, classified as primitive societies, are usually dismissed as torpid by nature, but more probably they are exhausted from the prodigious climb by which a small minority out of innumerable thousands reached the ledge alive from a lower ledge occupied by Sub-man. From this successful minority, a handful which we may now call civilized societies, have already started to climb up again to the next ledge out of sight overhead; all we know about this further point is that it represents the mutation where Man becomes Superman, or in religious terms a communion of Saints. We know, too, that the distance so far achieved is a minute fraction of the climb. We can see this in perspective by remembering that primitive Man began to climb out from the animal world some 300,000 years ago, whereas civilizations have only been organizing themselves for 6,000 years, and in that time their mortality has been so high that at the same rate (if we take Sir James Jeans’s estimate of the habitable duration of the world) we can foresee the birth and death of 1,743,000,000 civilizations. However disturbing such a figure may seem to believers in a single ‘Civilization’ (and it is perhaps meant to annoy them), there is a close relation between it and dangers of the precipice. The rock face presents the same threat to

civilizations as it did to primitive societies: a mistake will send them crashing to their death, but so, too, will an attempt to retrace their steps, or to rest. When once a society has started out, it has no choice but to collapse or reach the ledge above.

With the reservation that archaeologists may yet produce new candidates, and with some hesitation as to the extent of certain civilizations, Toynbee identifies twenty-six as having been born alive, in addition to four which miscarried. Of these twenty-six, no fewer than sixteen are already dead and can be seen on the rock face as more or less fragmentary skeletons; three more (the Esquimaux, Polynesians, and Nomads) may be dismissed as arrested civilizations which are pinned to the precipice, by a special kind of misjudgement, in a state of life-in-death; and this leaves five if we combine the two distinguishable Orthodox Christian societies into one, and similarly include the Far Eastern Society in China with its offshoot in Japan) a total of only five surviving societies:

The Modern Western Society.

The Orthodox Christian Society (adding South-East Europe to Russia).

The Islamic Society.

The Hindu Society.

The Far Eastern Society (including Korea and Japan with China).

We must notice that all the climbers left in the field are descendants of earlier civilizations (the first two, the twins of the Graeco-Roman 'Hellenic Society', are already in the third generation, since the Hellenic Society was itself the offspring of an earlier Minoan civilization). But when we look closer at these relatively young athletes, we find four of them so far gone in decay that their death is a predictable certainty; there remains only the Western society whose fate is in doubt.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Soviet Union and its international revolutionary pretensions are reduced in this perspective to a final phase in the disintegration of the Orthodox Christian Society after infection by Western Marxism. The fate of Communism in Toynbee's view, likely to be that of other religious movements which have turned militant in the same way, such as Maccabeanism or Sikhism. Beginning as a panacea for all mankind, they become imprisoned for effective purposes within the frontiers of a parochial state, are degraded into 'a local variety of Nationalism', and gradually see the state which has captured them imitate itself to the standard type of (in our world) increasingly totalitarian state-pattern.

The volumes of *A Study of History* are now given over to detailed examination of the societies' actions at every crucial turn in their climb or collapse. The major headings, 'Genesis', 'Growth', 'Breakdown', 'Disintegration', each bring with them conclusions based on empirical surveys of behaviour, and a pattern gradually emerges of a 'type-history' of civilization which sheds light on our own predicament. The pattern is surrounded by every kind of reservation, and we should constantly keep in the background of our minds Toynbee's refusal, in spite of his vivid metaphors, to consider civilizations as 'living organisms'—the individuals who compose them are the only living organisms, and the civilizations themselves no more, objectively, than 'the common ground between the respective fields of activity of a number of individual beings'.

We are faced at the outset by the problem of explaining why the figures on the ledge have ever woken from their sleep to face the dangers above them. The principles generally used in explanation are Race and Environment, but neither here nor at any point in the decadence are these solutions acceptable to Toynbee, at bottom, because he declines to see psychical differentiation explained by a set of differences in a non-psychical field. He has no difficulty in mobilizing modern scientific knowledge and his own relativist sense of humour against the Race Theory. A Kaffir servant-girl used to faint in the presence of some friends of his who were staying in South Africa; alarmed, they consulted an older servant who explained: 'The fact is, she has come straight from her village . . . and she isn't quite used to the white people's smell. But don't you worry . . . we all used to faint at first, but now we have quite got over it. . . .' Moreover, purity of smell or of race is an unpromising solution in view of the evolutionary success of mongrels. Similarly with environment; the evidence that by itself it can be the determining principle is misleading, even when physical environment is closely involved as, for instance, in the genesis of Egyptian civilization.

Toynbee's own conclusion is that a special type of conflict is responsible, that the primitive society (embodying a passive principle) only emerges from its torpor when it is challenged by another, negative principle. Mythology explains the creative social act in just these terms with the story of Adam and Eve whom the Serpent successfully challenges to abandon the paradisiac



‘food-gathering phase’ of primitive Man although a perfect integration had been achieved on that level; Job and Faust similarly emerge from an ordeal of testing by Satan to a higher plane than they would have reached without it. In the language of Chinese mythology, a passive Yin-state is transformed into Yang-activity. The event is psychological, it is a victory in the soul which can be seen even more clearly in the birth of ‘related’ or descendant civilizations which emerge (in response to an exclusively human challenge) from the body of a society in disintegration. But the Egyptian example, an ‘unrelated’ civilization born of a climatic challenge, is clear enough. The primitive communities who lived on wild game and plant-life in North Africa, when it had a temperate climate, chose various ways out at the end of the European Ice Age, when the atmosphere dried up and with it their food supplies. The escape chosen by some was to plunge south into the rich tropical monsoon belt; but others chose to go east to the Nile, which was water indeed, but so formidable a wilderness that it seemed a forlorn hope to those who shied away. The communities who stayed had a double task, not only to settle on new ground, but to achieve a new way of life, to become cultivators instead of ‘food-gatherers’. The scene for this necessary process was a continuous forest of uncontrolled and apparently uncontrollable papyrus swamps whose giant stems allowed only wild boars, hippopotami and crocodiles to pass. Here, within a few centuries, the civilization of Egypt had emerged; the effective response to a tremendous challenge; and Toynbee switches us away from Egyptian irrigation systems, literature and higher religion to watch, some hundreds of miles to the south in the present day, the descendants of the ‘sluggish and unambitious’ communities who chose the tropical escape—a series of squatting totem clans, the Dinka, still ruled over by rain-makers who are ceremonially killed before old age. ‘Just so,’ he comments, ‘some five or six thousand years ago, the fathers of the Egyptian civilization (perhaps accompanied by the forefathers of the Dinka . . . before the parting of their ways) were squatting on the edge of the jungle-swamp which at that time occupied the Lower Nile Valley and the Delta.’

The stimulation of conditions of pressure has its counterpart in the demoralization which sets in under conditions of ease. Biologically these reactions can be seen in the vigour of the pollarded



willow and the lanky growth of one which has never felt the axe. In the Bible the Lord 'scourgeth every son whom He receiveth'; and in Homer, it is not when confronting the Cyclops or Scylla and Charybdis that Odysseus comes nearest to failure, but on the lotus-eaters' island, in Circe's parlour and with Calypso. And this fundamental principle which is discerned by biology and mythology in the individual can be found not only decisively influencing the birth of civilizations, but pulsating more or less strongly, with more or less resulting achievement, throughout their existence. Bearing in mind that failures to respond with success at all are always in the majority in history as in evolution, we see from a survey of human achievement that 'hard' countries stimulate while 'soft' countries demoralize (notice 'Attic Salt' but 'Boeotian Swine'), new ground is more promising (and incidentally more productive of epic poetry) than old, military blows and pressures stimulate both counteraction (Rome-Carthage, France-Germany) and the regular polarization of political power at a threatened frontier. But there is a limit, of course, beyond which the severity of a challenge becomes inimical. The figures pinned alive to the face of the rock made the mistake of accepting too great a challenge; balked by a projection in the precipice, they performed the *tour de force* of levering themselves out over it, and had no further strength to move. Thus the Arrested civilizations weather away in immobility—the Nomads paralysed by the all-out effort to keep in touch with their 'flocks', the Polynesians by challenging great distances of sea with no better weapon than a canoe; the Esquimaux by the problem of sustaining life below zero. In scientific terminology, 'the most stimulating challenge is to be found in a mean between a deficiency of severity and an excess of it'.

While the working of 'Challenge and Response' clearly plays an essential role in this analysis of the growth of a civilization, it cannot by itself provide a *criterion* of growth. This is readily assumed by egocentric optimists of our Western Society (which now envelops every remaining civilization in the world), to be the extent of a civilization's command over its human environment, or its 'size'. But as soon as we remove the problem from its subjective context in the present and ask whether the Syriac and Hellenic civilizations, for instance, were more dynamic than the Indic or the Sinic because their expansive power was greater, we

spect that the question is absurd. Under empirical study of societies in their final stages of disintegration, the expansive tendency emerges as a general symptom of decline, automatically tailing a loss in qualitative terms; it is a disease,

an elephantiasis or fatty growth; a running to stalk or a running to seed; the malady of the reptiles, who turned huge on the eve of being surpassed by the mammals; or the malady of Goliath who grew to gigantic stature in order to succumb to David; or the malady of the ponderous Spanish galleons which were routed by an English mosquito-fleet.

The reason for the expansion of a society as it expires becomes clear when we analyse the process by which it absorbs another. The 'social rays' a civilization emits are of three kinds, economic, political and cultural, with varying speeds and intensities of penetration. In the growth period the rays given off are fused as harmoniously together as the elements of the society itself, and accordingly the infection of others is slow (as slow as the penetration of the cultural ray, which is the slowest but most complete in its effect); in decline, as a society rigidifies into hostile elements, the rays given off are diffracted, and penetrate at the speed of the fastest ray, the economic.

But if size is no criterion, is not increasing technical command of the environment a proof of growth? Should we not, with Tacitus after the wars of Justinian, criticize 'people who . . . persist in an open-mouth adulation of antiquity and refuse to admit the superiority of modern inventions'? The answer is provided by the usual empirical survey, but most spectacularly by the Assyrian Society and by the Hellenic itself, where an arrest or setback in civilization was invariably accompanied by an improvement in the art of war. The most that can be said for technical progress is that advance in its own sphere is shown by 'therialization', an increase in simplicity and subtlety, illustrated by the introduction of the alphabet in writing, or in our own society by the change-over from steam to oil, from telegraphy to telephony. Translated into biological terms, this criterion of growth would apply to the 'little theriomorphs', the ancestral mammals of H. G. Wells, fluently adapting themselves to problems which defeated the reptiles. In individual and social terms the criterion becomes the presence or absence of self-determination. Thus in a crucial response, from which the mainstream of Hellenic

civilization flowed, the challenge produced by over-population in the Greek States was met by Athens with the specialization of her own internal agriculture and manufacture for export. Corinth and Chalcis had already responded to the pressure by overseas colonization, Sparta by attacking her neighbours; and while Corinth and Chalcis simply reproduced themselves abroad and Sparta crippled herself by the strain of militarism, Athens developed internally. Her economic innovations called into being new classes, and in response to this further challenge Athenian statesmen made a series of adjustments to her political institutions which flowered in democracy. The growth of Athens, by this criterion, took place in an interval between the first two centuries of Greek expansion and the later outburst under Alexander, culminating at last in the enormity of the Roman Empire.

Growth is thus a process in which challenges, arising thick and fast from an originally successful response, are solved more and more internally; creative minorities 'withdraw', as Athens withdrew in the early centuries, to return later with an appropriate solution which is copied by other members of the society. These minorities may be 'penalized', they may be forced to withdraw, like Thucydides in the Peloponnesian War, or Machiavelli from Florence at the end of the intensive Italian Renaissance, or the Quakers and other Nonconformists from England at the Restoration—or they may go voluntarily, like Moses on Sinai or Plato's Philosopher Kings, but 'the return is the essence of the whole movement', however reluctantly it may be undertaken.

Their solutions, if they are brought back to a society which is still in growth, are followed, by the few to whom their message leaps as a spark, and by the mass process of mimesis which persuaded even animals to listen to the music of Orpheus. A growing society is thus like a walker, whose first leg, as it leaves the ground, is the creative minority, and whose back leg, the uncreative majority, continues to support the body until the moment has come, with the return to earth of the front leg, to imitate the forward movement. To sustain the process an *élan* is necessary, which we may call Promethean because the conservatism of society opposes it as obstinately as Zeus did.

The nature of breakdown now becomes clearer. If the creative minorities lose, for a reason we shall see, their creative power, the process of mimesis no longer works, and stung by the whips of

explained command, the majority goes into revolt. The harmony of a walker is then replaced by the internal conflict of an invalid or schizophrenic.

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Toynbee's inspection of the corpses scattered about the precipice of human history showed us only one climber who might conceivably be flourishing, and even here, where we have to suspend final diagnosis, the odds against survival appear to be at best sixteen to ten and possibly twenty-five to one. But theories of the inevitability of decay fail to impress Toynbee; he has no difficulty in tracing back 'cyclical' explanations to the Babylonian discovery of 'Great Years' beyond the lunar and solar cycles of our own planetary system; and theories of 'degeneracy' are unsupported by evidence. Environment, he considers, whether in the shape of loss of technique or attacks from outside the society, can no more be blamed than the Nemesis or Fate held responsible by Hellenic pessimists. The technical asset of the Roman roads survived the Empire which created it, and investigation of the breakdowns of all civilizations shows that so far from falling victim to external attack like the majority of primitive societies, they have all, with one or two exceptions where the evidence is complete, perished by their own hand. Leaving out the arrested and abortive societies, there have been seventeen suicides. Gibbon diagnosed the fall of the Roman Empire as due to 'the triumph of barbarism and religion', but only because he assumed the age of the Antonines, where he begins, to be a culmination of growth instead of the mere imposing façade of a ruin blasted by more than four centuries of war. In reality the breakdown of the Hellenic Society can be discerned at the outbreak of the Atheno-Loconnesian War, when the Greek States, which had stood together to dispose of Xerxes, proceeded to fall upon one another at their moment of victory. The event is a confession of failure in creative power which reveals the nature of social breakdown as early as the achievement in the Nile Valley illustrates social birth. When Athens had solved her population problem by revolutionizing production on an intensive basis for export, she brought on herself, among the other challenges which a successful response produces, the necessity of organizing a stable international society by freely agreed limitation of City-State sovereignty. The interests of unhindered trade made this imperative. But no



sooner had the need made its appearance, than the City-State institution began to acquire 'affection'. The least abandonment of sovereignty was achieved by force, whether the force was external, as when the pressure of Xerxes produced the Delian League, or applied by Athens herself in the tyranny of the Athenian Empire which issued in war with Sparta. The history of the Hellenic Society from 431 B.C. now becomes a series of intensifying wars and class struggles as the unsolved City-State problem swells into the unsolved parochial Great Power problem, and Rome and Carthage and Macedon in an ever-expanding society slaughter one another's armies on a greater scale than the Greek City-States. This tragic process, blowing up into enormity instead of progressing to solution, is only ended by a knock-out blow; Rome then rules by force a world which has doomed itself to disintegrate after the brief Indian summer which forcible unification tends to produce.

A political pattern of this kind seems to emerge from most of the civilizations that have broken down; the event itself is marked by the onset of a 'Time of Troubles' whose great length has, apparently, a limit set to it by the human capacity to suffer before resorting to desperate remedies. The Babylonian 'Time of Troubles' is compounded of the aggressiveness of Assyria and the refusal of a culturally superior Babylon to be absorbed; in China the member-States composing the Sinic Civilization devastate one another for four centuries after the first struggle for hegemony between Tsin and Ch'u; in the Sumerian Society the 'Time of Troubles' begins in the twenty-seventh century B.C., when the class-war between Urakagina of Lagash and the local priesthood is followed by the militarism of Urakagina's successor.

The final act also tends to be the same: one of the fratricides—if any has the strength, and if not, an adventurer from outside—emerges as conqueror and imposes by force the peace which the member-States failed to achieve freely before their problem became unmanageable. Then, promoted by war-weariness, the *Pax Augusta*, *Pax Mongolica*, *Pax Incaica*, *Pax Ottomanica*, purchased at the price of submission to a universal State, conceals for a varying period the profound wounds, strains and deprivations inside the body of the dying society, which expires sooner or later from an infection that the wind of history does not fail to carry.

In the pattern after breakdown there are regular characters, such



refugees and deserters, and mounting sequences: prophet—ill-sergeant—terrorist; punishment—judicial murder—atrocity; there are comparable periods of rout and rally, a regular pathological intensification of problems; and in a kind of ominous political counterpart, the powers on the periphery of the dying society grow into giants overshadowing the original contestants at the centre. The distinctive 'style' which came with growth was the result of different challenges differently responded to, but when a challenge remains unanswered, it continues to demand a solution which at the same time becomes increasingly difficult; it presses 'with a merciless uniformity' on its victims until the ramping and distorting effects have spread into every aspect of life.

Probing the core of creative failure, where he refuses to see 'degeneracy', Toynbee accuses a fatal intractability of institutions as being the fault which sets off the series Decline and Fall, ripping the epigoni 'like those hideous strait-waistcoats in which, in Ancient Egypt, well framed and healthy children were deliberately deformed into artificial dwarfs'. New forces, emotions and aptitudes arise in a society and demand the readjustment of institutions created to suit earlier drives; but the adjustment is not made, or is made insufficiently, with the result that the institution is swept away by revolution ('a retarded and proportionately violent act of mimesis'), or becomes distorted into a social enormity'. Thus the drive of democracy applied to education with the hopeful intention of making it 'available' for 'the masses' (apart from its traditional background and regardless of the 'law' that learning is sterilized by diffusion), has resulted in enormities like the Yellow Press and the cinema. Other modern enormities are parochial sovereignty and war, geared up to take the drives of industrialism and democracy.

A psychological or moral flaw is the cause of the intractability of institutions, and it is almost invariably because creative minorities are dogged by two temptations, yielding to either of which will convert them into dominant minorities. They are tempted to rest passively on their oars and admire their achievement, as Athenian statesmen deified their City-State as 'the education of Hellas', or more actively, in an intoxication of victory, to rush, like Assyria, from success to suicide. The walker, turned sprinter, trips and crashes; the self-satisfied climber relaxes his grip; in

religious terms, the sin of idolatry has been committed in the worship of the created thing instead of the Creator.

Short of this, the creative individual can be counted on to repeat somewhat mechanically the motions which have brought him success in the past, so that *the party that has distinguished himself in dealing with one challenge is apt to fail conspicuously in attempting to deal with the next*. Psychologically, the odds are on the dark horse, not the favourite. But in society the *ci-devant* creators are the most likely candidates for office; their past achievement, which disqualifies them for the future, tends to assure them of its control. It would be difficult, for instance, to estimate the damage done by war-winners at peace conferences.

As the pattern of decline stands out more and more clearly from the variations unravelling themselves in all corners of the screen, we become aware, in spite of warnings against precise guesses about our own condition, that something suspiciously like a 'Time of Troubles' may have set in among ourselves about four centuries ago. Certainly, war weariness has not yet brought submission to an enforced universal State; but the extent of Hitler's success is significant. Parochial warfare has now eaten into the body of the Western Society for four centuries: the fanatical religious wars beginning in the sixteenth century have become the jet-propelled nationalist wars which began with Napoleon. And if, as is now inevitable without an all-round eleventh-hour conversion to humility, a totalitarian universal State supersedes the individual members of the species, there is no doubt where Toynbee would place the original breakdown.

In 'medieval' Christendom, when the West might still be called an articulated society, the master institution was the Papacy of Hildebrand, founded to combine centralism in ecclesiastical affairs with political devolution among the member States. The parochial States themselves were recognized as man-made institutions deserving 'that conscientious but unenthusiastic performance of a minor social duty which we render, in our time, to our municipalities and county councils'. But, intoxicated by the victory of its own reforms, the Papacy demanded unrestricted sovereignty in its own field instead of a limited constitutional authority over an undivided Christian Commonwealth. The result of this disastrous authoritarianism—a parallel to the tragedy of Periclean Athens—was that the Pope saw the whole of his

power vanish in the States that turned Protestant, and most of it those that professedly remained Catholic. But the Pope's loss was small by comparison with our own, for the emotional attitudes, the devotion and self-abasement, whose proper field is religion, were collected by the parochial States in the form of patriotism'. The scene had been set for the enormities which today overwhelm us.

Clear as he is, when Toynbee records the final passages of disintegration, one has the impression of a choreographer disturbed (within the limits of his moderation) by the attempt to transcribe the climax of Walpurgisnacht. Split now by its own voice of stasis, the civilization sees the harmony of its growth-period disintegrate into splinters. Three major cracks traverse the picture: the internal proletariat secedes from the dominant minority, alienated by an emotional disaffection which includes and spreads wider than the Marxian 'exploitation'; while the external proletariat, still in the society's field of radiation, separates itself off behind a frontier from which it embarks on predatory raids. The dominant minority itself splits into active and passive variations on the attitudes which before the breakdown made creative contributions to birth and growth; the products are now hangmen and wastrels, public servants, the makers of universal States, and philosophers. A wider range of types in the internal proletariat is further complicated by the influence which begins to penetrate from alien cultures. The effect is creative among the internal proletariat whose attraction to alien sources of inspiration is increased by distaste for the institutions of the dominant minority. From the submerged cultures around them the Hellenic internal proletariat chose, in preference to the Roman State religion, Mithraism from Iran, Isis-worship from Egypt, Cybele from the remote Hittite Society, and Christianity from the Syriac Society.

Meanwhile resorts to Archaism and Futurism, two substitutes for growth which entail impossible jumps forwards and backwards in time, fail to restore unity to a civilization which is increasingly menaced by the attacks of the external proletariat on its borders and the pressure of the internal proletariat at home. Of the polarized attitude gentleness-violence which marks the external proletariat, it is gentleness which is most remarkable in the disaffected Hellenic 'proletariat', and violence (beginning

with the revolt of the High German peasantry in the sixteenth century) which has stamped our own. Similarly the Hellenic internal proletariat, like the Egyptian in the phase of Osiris worship, finally settles on a religion which promises resurrection in a life transcending the disastrous situation on earth. Biologically in this dramatic and final act of secession from the dominant minority, the internal proletariat achieves the response by which a new 'related' civilization is born from the wreckage of the old; in religious terms it does literally gain access to eternal life. (If we can discover no counterpart of this breakaway, apart from Communism, in our own society, that may be one of the few important, if negative, grounds for belief in our future; it would suggest that in our heart of hearts there is a lurking confidence that our civilization will survive.<sup>1</sup>)

At this point Toynbee is interrupted by the war of 1939. In his next and final volumes, begun in 1946, he moves on from individual civilizations, which have been his units of intelligible study hitherto, to consider the interaction arising from their contacts in time and space.



The criticism of Toynbee which is worth noticing tends to take the form of examination by a specialist of an area in *A Study of History* and an implied charge of subjective interpretation. But these are small and technical operations in the shadow of such a panorama, even when the findings are correct as far as they go. Our own rough sketches of Toynbee's personality and his account of civilizations invite us to choose the risks—they are substantial—of a head-on approach.

His style, decisively influenced by the authors who were his favourites before he left Oxford, has become a precision instrument with Greek instead of Arabic markings on it, and a cutting edge sharpened by the moral intensity of the West. The influence

<sup>1</sup> Originally Toynbee considered this a crucial indication. His preface to *Greek Historical Thought* (Dent, 1924), foresaw a new religion 'yet unborn, which will undoubtedly lay up a new treasure in a new heaven as our world sinks, to founder at last like its predecessors in "the abyss where all things are incommensurable"'. *A Study of History* (vol. V, 1939) can only trace two conceivable candidates, both of Islamic origin, and founded in the nineteenth century: the Bahā'iyah derivative of the Bābi Sect, and the Ahmadiyah, both of which have sent missionaries to the West.



of Bergson can be seen in his clear-headedness in the most difficult surroundings, in the technique of metaphor, for instance, which guides us successively as climber, walker, racehorse and leaping fish through the scenery which spreads and dwindles on his Penelope's web of history. Bergson suggests, too, the method of interpretation on multiple layers, biological, religious, psychological, and the appeals to mythology. The Bible is a kind of supplementary language to Toynbee, but more deeply embedded than Greek or Latin, because in those rare spots where one suspects fatigue of taking toll, the argument is wholly encased in it. Gibbon provides some of the scale and grasp, the 'extensiveness and penetration' which he defined as his own qualities, but acts otherwise as a kind of catalyst, his cynicism being reversed to bite into self-importance and every kind of prejudice engrained by parochialism. Toynbee has, too, the exactness and disciplined sense of scholarship which were lacking in Gibbon. It would, for instance, be unthinkable to find him making a radical alteration in the scope of his book, as Gibbon did while writing *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

Clothed in its own great dignity, the thought of *A Study of History* has nevertheless a strong contemporary imprint. Toynbee's sense of relativity, which has the freshness and depth of Proust or the early psycho-analysts, is no intruder in our atmosphere of popularized physics where Bergson's idealism is itself partly out of date. Again, while it needed a peculiar sensibility and wide references to link the deaths of maritime empires in Crète in 1912, the climate of opinion after two world wars has caught up with Toynbee's premonitions. His relationship with modern psychology is fundamental because of the depth at which he transfers emphasis from external accidents to internal determining influences, diagnosing connections where conservative historians pride themselves on seeing a series of unrelated happenings. Thus the psycho-analyst's credo: 'The act knows so often how to disguise itself as a passive experience', is an ideal summary of Toynbee on breakdowns; they are neuroses leading to suicide, not street accidents from fatigue ensuing on various kinds of bad luck. In terms of his own social analysis, one might note as other contemporary signs in Toynbee, his command of a dozen languages, which although rare even among scholars, is representative of the present multi-lingual stage of social development, just as his



evocation of different periods at the same time and a tendency towards gigantism, are mirrored, without the same impeccable taste, in the structure of our cities.

While we cannot accuse Toynbee of having influenced buildings whose foundations were laid before his birth, we should be very closely on guard against unconsciously seeing the contemporary scene through his eyes. His influence has been greater than is known, operating for the most part indirectly as an inaccessible Book of All Power where minor prophets as varied as Aldous Huxley, E. H. Carr, Lewis Mumford and Jacques Maritain, and statesmen from General Smuts to Viscount Samuel, have drawn without always precisely indicating their source.

Moving closer to what is peculiar in Toynbee's contemporaneity, we are struck by the emphatic Hellenic influence which extends down to the wording of *A Study of History*. The prominence of Greece and Rome in his education has, in fact, become a gravitational pull. 'If Austerlitz was Austria's Cynosephalæ,' he says in a typical comparative epigram, 'Wagram was her Pydna.' And if, when he travels, the hills behind Chinese Kowloon remind him forcibly of the Isles of Greece, it may well imply that his approach to Far Eastern history, as well as Austrian, and *a fortiori* his conjectures about the almost unknown course of, say, Andean civilization, are influenced by his knowledge of the Hellenic world. This is the point of precision which emerges from the charges of subjectivism. But we must go on, if we suspect Toynbee of applying Greek history as a pattern, to ask what is special in his own interpretation of Greek history. 'This analysis is and must be subjective,' he wrote at the end of an outline he drew when he was thirty-one; and his pattern has itself changed slightly even in fundamentals—in his estimate of Nemesis, for instance, he has heightened the importance of guilt, but minimized the necessity of incurring it; he has redrawn details of time as well as moral emphasis, and can be found trying out different possibilities to discover how the points of resemblance between Hellenic civilization and our own can be made to throw light on our prospects.

One discusses these 'off-stage' adjustments with reluctance, not only because they may provide a sense of naïve reassurance to the critics training instruments on bits and pieces, but also because Croce's scorn of the 'insinuations' of psychological criticism is at its most justifiable when applied to a work whose scholarship is

readed with a scrupulous awareness of its limitations. Nevertheless, and if only to clear the air of vague charges, let us face the possibility that we are here in the presence of an impulse more primitive even than astrology, an anxiety of the kind which drives British Israelites' to search the pyramids for a miraculous foreknowledge of history, and to discover—when other measuring scales have failed to extract bread from the pharaonic stone—a special 'pyramid-inch' which neatly does the trick.

Toynbee has made a life study of death. At almost any moment where we can see him—in childhood fascinated by a Victorian Race Game where lead horsemen crash at obstacles according to the throw of the dice; as he learns the classical languages whose perfection only emphasizes the fact that they are extinct; in Bergson, where more vividly than in Plato or Heraclitus, reality is drained from the clear-cut appearance of things to be given instead to their mutability; on his travels as he watches the horizon ahead ('Have you ever seen roads die? It is a fearful and a wonderful thing to see. . .'), as he quotes A. E. Housman on the barrow covering a Ming Emperor, or reflects that the star in the night sky may already be extinct—anywhere and everywhere, in his nursery and study as vividly as in cities from Peking to London, he sees through the splendour of the moment to the death secretly preparing within.

We have noticed already what response Toynbee makes to a sense of disorder; it is the opposite of prostration—in Siberia he pulls out a map from his pocket, at Kobe he buys a Japanese railway-guide; the call to surrender is answered by an act of mastery. Only a profound character-trait of this sort could have made it technically possible to marshal the myriad facts of known history, and to tackle them with the superbly disciplined planning which is obvious on the first title-pages. Occasionally we even catch sight of this mechanism working so to speak in free-wheel, when for instance the events he is relating in *A Study of History* pass near the point in time or space where he himself happens to be describing them, and to dispel a sense of muddled significance, he makes a footnote 'placing' his own accidental situation in relation to the major events. The order which is then achieved is really only of interest to himself. But when we find a sense of insecurity of this personal kind (and we may fairly call it personal if it is already to be found in the stable world of a Victorian

childhood), confirmed in reality by the cataclysmic upheavals which have shaken our civilized world since the turn of the century, what are we to expect? Not, from what we know of him, the neurosis which incapacitates the majority of sensitive people from action or creation of any effective kind, nor, even more certainly, a 'sensible' gesture of the map, time-table variety. If a mind like Toynbee's makes any response at all it will be on a scale inspired by the chaos around him.

We can thus see the working of Challenge and Response as the central clue to Toynbee himself; in these terms *A Study of History* becomes the gigantic response of an individual to the challenge of a disordered civilization, it is an attempt to achieve order out of disintegration. And if, excited by this revelation of Toynbee's personality as the pollarded willow, we go on to switch other of his interpretations back from the scene of history to his own mind, we shall of course not fail to apply them successfully. 'Withdrawal and Return' can be seen in the deep habit of a historian who works in cycles of research and exposition as well as in his peculiar alternation between academic and practical life. An increase in self-mastery must have been the internal development which enabled the writing of *A Study of History* to take place at all.

Ways of achieving immortality multiply and gain interest in the presence of death. The biological method of producing children, and the religious flying leap into eternal life, are both noted by Toynbee as symptomatic of civilizations in decline, just as Trotsky on a smaller scale observes that Marie Antoinette and the Tsarina 'both see rainbow dreams as they drown'—they are convinced precisely by the chasms opening under them that their surroundings have achieved a miraculous stability. But there is yet another means by which the determined individual can win a way out from disaster into permanence; more certain than the others, it is also open to fewer candidates because the qualifications are high. Inspired by the disintegrating action of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides writes his account of it not only to distil from the break-up of his world the clarity and order of a 'true history', but above all to leave behind 'an everlasting possession'. If art is great enough, it survives; and Thucydides was only so confident of survival because he could detail with precision the amount of labour and self-discipline which went into the making of his History. These are not the type of conditions which would deter

toynbee, and if we are right in suspecting that *A Study of History* is an answer to the challenge of chaos, it would be out of character if he failed to deliver his answer on several planes at once, and not least to make it an everlasting possession in itself.<sup>1</sup>

The astrology column of a newspaper and the 'pyramid-inch' are means of dealing with anxiety for a million uncritical subscribers, but they neither save souls for the after-life of religion, nor have much likelihood of survival in their own right as objects of interest to a future civilization. Toynbee, on the other hand, is a candidate for both these forms of immortality, and if he suffers from a *manie de l'ordre* which intrigues, without satisfying, our taste for astrology, he will make no further concession to it than his rival candidatures allow. For religious reasons (although he often presents them on a purely logical plane) he declines to recognize any necessity in the recurrence of historical patterns; they can be changed for the better, he insists, by a state of grace, a rebirth in humility of the kind which would characterize a communion of saints. By producing at a scarcely credible personal cost in self-discipline a guide as to how this may be done, he invites comparison, as we have noticed, 'with the prophets who saved their own souls in the act of saving their followers'. Equally as an artist and historian, Toynbee declines to be lured by a primitive need of reassurance into lowering his standards; on the contrary, so sense the temptation is by itself enough to make him raise them, so that the specialists with surveying apparatus are hard put to in their search for a chink in his armour of precise reservation. With subtlety and caution which contrast with the rashness of the psychologists in their curative enthusiasm, he produces something more than a guide to salvation: his book is a philosophical essay as well as a work of art.

We find then that there is an exacting element in Toynbee's own most subjective tendencies which holds the rest in check. We may suspect, for instance, that he exaggerates the seduction

<sup>1</sup> In an autobiographical note (in *Britain Between West and East*, Contact Books, 1946) Toynbee points out that 'the works of artists and men of letters outlive the deeds of business men, soldiers and statesmen. The poets and the philosophers outrange the historians; while the prophets and the saints overtop and outlast them all. The ghosts of Agamemnon and Pericles haunt the living world today by grace of the magic words of Homer and Thucydides; and when Homer and Thucydides are no longer read, it is safe to prophesy that Christ and the Buddha and Socrates will still be fresh in the memory . . .'



of easy surroundings and the helpful stimulus of pressure. Was it really true that Odysseus was more nearly capsized by Circe and Calypso than by the rocks thrown by Polyphemus? So Toynbee argues, and so he lays the stress, convincing us of the unexpected advantages of danger and handicap until we are tempted to revolt; but in the end, urbanely, he defeats the revolt by joining it, pointing briefly to a law of 'diminishing returns' which leaves no room, intellectually, for a charge of exaggeration, although we may feel that he has impressed our emotions more vividly with the virtues of extreme hardship.

So, too, with his diagnosis of the 'late' stages of Greek history. Was the pride of Athens exclusively responsible for breakdown? May not the process of civilization automatically store up reserves of undischarged aggression which will find an outlet sooner or later in suicide? Toynbee is far from ruling out the mounting tension of guilt and rival fears and greeds, but he sees in the idolatry of an institution the point of focus which can explain and illuminate the rest without sacrificing it. Nor does he deny, like Spengler, the validity of other interpretations; if he is a prophet, he is not the repository of final truth. He is cautious, groping his way through history with fingers which search for something almost without expecting to find it. If there are extremes in his character, they are in his scope and strength, not in a dogged pursuit of his own eccentricities. His diagnosis of recurrent patterns never ends in anything so crude as a theory that history repeats itself, although he knows there is truth in that exaggeration; his love of taking bearings never turns his speculations into prediction. His tabulating habits, his swift exchange of one plane for another, his gravitation towards Greece, form a system under which history becomes intelligible without suffering restriction.

It is rather as though a man finding himself unexpectedly in possession of a dozen spot-lights turned them on the scene of civilized history. We see at once that a gigantic drama is proceeding on a scale which we had not, for one reason and another, suspected of extending beyond a misty area at our feet. The number of actors, the intensity of the conflict, the depth beyond depth which spread out among the illuminated patches, are all new to us. In spite of something austere in the atmosphere we have a sense of liberation, a feeling that hitherto our minds have been unbearably cramped. We may of course complain about the placing of the



reams, about their individual colour, though we are unlikely to mistake their peculiar brilliance. Just as this scenery has looked different to other periods, so its perspective and emphasis will change again, for the spotlights, as Toynbee might say, are provisional'. Thrown from our epoch, they illuminate as far as we can see at the moment. What remains astonishing is that we should have produced any individual of the size and strength to perform this creative act.

## INNOVATION AND TRADITION IN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC—I.

### THE TRADITIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MUSIC OF ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG

*RENÉ LEIBOWITZ*

WHEN it comes to criticizing or discussing the works of Arnold Schönberg and his school, few critics ever admit that the aspects in which these works differ from those of the past are of a secondary nature, whereas it is in their continuation of musical tradition that the primary problem lies. Possibly most critics have failed to notice the traditional aspect, and it may be because of this that, until now, many things have been said about the so-called special qualities of the music of Schönberg, Berg, and Webern, while hardly anything has been mentioned about their most important quality, which is their use of the essential principles of musical composition. The vague and misleading terms of 'tonal' and 'atonality', inevitably used in reference to their music, have done a lot of harm in this respect. In the first place, these terms are slogans and, like all slogans, a simplification

making things easy for those who do not wish to think. In the second place, they imply some sort of restraint where tones are concerned, and considering that music deals mainly with tones—i.e. sounds—this can only give a totally false picture of the aims of any true musician. For it is certain that the composers I am discussing are true musicians, and although it may appear academic, I shall attempt to demonstrate this precisely on the lines which so far, for some obscure reason, seem to have been avoided.

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What strikes most people on first hearing the works of Schönberg is their dissonant quality. Let me say, to begin with, that apart from the fact that there is no absolute difference between consonance and dissonance, many listeners have become quite accustomed to the 'worst' discords, and yet they have not become capable at the same time of appreciating or understanding even some of the relatively early works of Schönberg, Berg or Webern, in which the dissonances are not really very bad. This shows: (a) that the so-called dissonances are not the outstanding characteristic of these works, and (b) that the same dissonances, while being new elements, are also traditional ones.

Let us examine the second point first. The whole evolution of polyphony—ever since its very beginning, somewhere around the tenth century right down to the music of Wagner and the other romantics—shows a continuous progress in dissonance. At the beginning only very few harmonic relationships were considered to be consonant (unison, octaves, perfect fifths). Gradually more and more combinations of simultaneous sounds were promoted to the same rank (thirds, sixths, in some cases fourths). What is more, an increasing use was being made of dissonant chords until finally, in Wagner's music, it is possible to observe that the so-called dissonances are predominant. It thus becomes clear that the progressive and ever-increasing use of dissonance is one of the main aspects of musical tradition. Obviously, every real composer, while introducing new sounds—and thus being original—merely continues the logical chain of musical evolution, and in this is traditional. As I have said, people do get accustomed to the new sounds because there is no fundamental difference between them and the old ones. Wagner's harmony may be dissonant compared with Mozart's, yet it has now become agreeable to the ear—in fact, consonant—for most listeners.

From all this a new question arises: what is it exactly that has forced musical evolution into the path of increasing dissonance? The answer is a simple one. *It is the widening of the scope of the composer's awareness in regard to the possibilities of the chromatic scale.* The tonal system (which has been the basis of all musical practice during the last three centuries) although of diatonic origins, has incorporated, from its very beginning, the use of the possibilities offered by the chromatic scale. The progressive extension of these possibilities has determined the progress of dissonance. No wonder, then, if Wagner's music—essentially chromatic in so far as it investigates some possibilities of the chromatic scale unheard until then—also makes a preponderant use of dissonance.

The characteristics in this domain of Wagner's music determine the musical situation in which Schönberg found himself working at the beginning of his career, let us say somewhere around 1897. His genuine and strongly developed musical temperament attracted him towards the great masters of his time—Wagner, Brahms, Bruckner, Mahler—whose language he assimilated with the greatest vigour. But, being in the true sense traditional, he also became an innovator (innovation as we have it being essentially a traditional quality in all great composers), and therefore found himself compelled to further the tradition inherited from the past. All the possibilities of the chromatic scale had to be used, and so all the harmonic and melodic figures which this scale can give birth became permanent features in the music of Schönberg and his school.

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However, as I have already said, all this is only one particular aspect, certainly not the most important one, of this music. If this were the case, listeners who have long ago become familiar with new sounds, would by now appreciate Schönberg's music. The reason his music is so difficult to understand is simply that it is the work of a great composer, that is to say, of a man whose musical thought is rich and complex. To compose music is to think in musical features. When we analyse a piece of music we say: this is the melody, this the harmony, this the rhythm, the form is such, the orchestration used is such; moreover, we describe all these elements and we try to seize their logic and their interdependence. The composer thinks synthetically in melodies, harmonies, orchestral sounds, etc.: that is musical thought.

Like all thought, musical thought must be clearly stated and expressed in order to be understood, which means that it needs articulation, unity in spite of diversity, or to use Schönberg's own terms, 'logic in spite of variety'. The most important tool with which to produce this result is the concept of musical variation. All the great masters of the past have striven to incorporate this concept as the fundamental means of musical composition, but what has been implicit in the past has become explicit for the first time in the work of Arnold Schönberg.

There again, Schönberg's attitude is one of exceptional lucidity, *an attitude of awareness in regard to the principles of compositional problems.*

Such an attitude emphasizes the composer's real task, who thus considered, is a man who creates under the highest possible artistic tension, inventing incessantly, employing continuously all his faculties: a man whose richness of imagination must never be limited, but give birth to an unlimited amount of musical features while organizing them in a way that is logical and coherent.

The fundamental problem of composition may therefore be expressed as follows: *maximum of invention with minimum of means*, that is, invent a great variety of musical features while stating them as shortly and clearly as possible. If we admit this, we see that it becomes necessary to find a tool of sufficient power to produce coherence and unity where profusion could easily lead to chaos. As I have already pointed out, such a tool is to be found in the concept of variation, but the full potentialities of this concept, in the form inherited by Schönberg from the past, had not yet been developed. That is where Schönberg's innovation becomes radical. The concept of variation is extended to the concept of *perpetual variation*.

Let us look at this more closely. The idea of variation implies that we vary *something*. Perpetual variation means (a) that we vary continuously (which becomes identical to inventing new figures continuously), and (b) that we vary all the time the same thing. From there we deduce that the origin of the process of such composition is what Schönberg calls a *unifying idea*.

It is this unifying idea which, long before it led to Schönberg's so-called atonal works, has formed the main characteristic of his music. We need not wonder at the difficulty with which we are



confronted when we try to understand even some of his early works. Already a work like the *First String Quartet*, in D minor, Op. 7 (1904) does not content itself with the elementary unity provided by the simple use of tonal functions. The musical thought is enriched here 'by a thematic superstructure of extraordinary compactness with regard to *motif*-relationships. The *First String Quartet*, a piece of unusual length and variety, is built up of but a few basic thematic elements which appear again and again in manifold variations and combinations'.<sup>1</sup>

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We are now in possession of the two main principles which determine the character and evolution of Schönberg's music.

The continuous use of all the possibilities of the chromatic scale has led Schönberg to transgress the limits of the classical tonal system, which, originally diatonic, could no longer contain the elements thus produced. Harmonically, for instance, the classical theory admitted of only a few dozen chords (transposed on all the degrees they amount to a few hundred) while the chromatic scale is known to be able to produce 55 different chords of 3 sounds, 165 chords of 4 sounds, 330 chords of 5 sounds, 462 chords both of 6 and of 7 sounds, again 330, 165 and 55 chords of respectively 8, 9 and 10 sounds, 11 chords of 11 sounds, and one chord of 12 sounds, totalizing over 2,000, with transpositions over 4,000 chords. Needless to say, melodically also a similar enrichment takes place. By suspending the classical tonal functions for the first time in his *Second String Quartet*, Op. 10, in 1908) Schönberg introduces a musical style in which all these new elements become permanent and definitive features.

We now come to the point when Schönberg was forced to make complete use of his concept of variation, or rather, when it became necessary for this concept to be formulated explicitly in the form of a precise technique of composition. The tonal functions, in spite of their not being an *end* but only a *means* of achieving unity, had the power to articulate and co-ordinate musical thought. The necessary suspension of these functions, however, deprives musical thought of one of its most powerful and most binding elements of organization. New means had to be found. For a few years (between 1908 and 1914) Schönberg does not seem to bother so much about all this, being at that time

<sup>1</sup> Ernst Krenek, *Studies in Counterpoint*. Schirmer, New York, 1940.

mainly preoccupied with the idea of carrying to its most extreme consequences the handling of the new 'chromatic' material. The chief works of this period are: the piano pieces, Op. 11 and Op. 19, the *George Lieder*, Op. 15, the five orchestral pieces, Op. 16, the two dramatic works *Erwartung* and *Die Glückliche Hand* and the *Pierrot Lunaire*, Op. 21. In the latter work we find a tendency towards contrapuntal and rigorous forms, which indicates that the fundamental principles of composition as such, are again one of his major worries.

Between 1914 and 1922 Schönberg did not publish one single work. His time was devoted entirely to the research and formulation of a theoretical principle based on certain constant phenomena which occurred in his latest works and of those of his followers, Berg and Webern, a principle which would enable him to make up for the lack of tonal unity arising from the suspension of tonality. The result was to be the twelve-tone technique, first tried out in portions of the *Five Piano Pieces*, Op. 23, and in the *Serenade*, Op. 24 (1923), and finally completely adopted in the *Piano Suite*, Op. 25, and in the *Quintet for Wind Instruments*, Op. 26 (1924).

Concerning the origin of that technique Schönberg says: 'I was always occupied with the aim of basing the structure of my music consciously on a unifying idea, which produced not only all the other ideas but regulated also their accompaniment and the chords, the "harmonies"'.<sup>1</sup>

It is here that the concept of perpetual variation becomes a technical principle. The unifying idea is the musician's original thought. It may occur in the composer's mind in the form of a *motif*, a theme, a chord, or a series of chords. At any rate, its main characteristic is a series of intervals, either in horizontal or in vertical order. This series of intervals thus becomes the origin and support of all further ideas. In short, all the elements of a given composition will be perpetual variations of the original, fundamental series. Thus Schönberg creates the *serial technique* of which the *Five Piano Pieces*, Op. 23, make use in different ways. Its profound sense lies in the following points:

1. It unifies the melodic material.
2. It enhances the logic of harmony.
3. It creates the unity of melody and harmony.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Slominsky (published in the latter's book *Music since 1900*).

the first two points have, as we have seen, always been Schönberg's chief preoccupations; the second point in particular needed a new device since the suspension of the tonal functions. The third point is one of the most radical aspects of the concept of variation.<sup>1</sup>

The serial technique, combined with the attitude of accepting the total possibilities of the chromatic scale thus becomes the basis of the twelve-tone technique. The unifying idea is a series of twelve different sounds arranged in a certain order, which originates in the composer's mind. Together with its transpositions and typical derivations (inversion of the series and retrograde motions, these derivatives being classical types of melodic variation), the series is used functionally throughout the whole composition, and gives birth to all melodic and harmonic figures. Thus a method of composition is established which, without the aid of tonality, and based on the full and radical application of the concept of variation, makes it possible for the new musical features to organize themselves as logical coherent entities.

Such is an important part of Schönberg's contribution to musical tradition. Once more, let me say that the renewal thus thought about is a genuine and necessary consequence of the tradition itself. It is my firm belief that what differentiates Schönberg from other great masters is not more and not less than what has always differentiated one great master from another; that is to say, the specific and original qualities of their respective personalities. But what, in spite of a seemingly striking dissimilarity, creates a profound analogy between Schönberg and his great predecessors, is an attitude which they share concerning the fundamental and constant laws of logic, coherence and clearness applied to the organization of the musical material at their disposal.

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Schönberg's traditional achievements have still another aspect which I would like to mention. One can say, without exaggerating, that the height of musical romanticism caused a serious musical crisis. This crisis had many facets. In the first place, we

<sup>1</sup> Its origin can be traced back to the *Chamber Symphony*, Op. 9 (1906), where series of fourths is used both melodically and harmonically as one of the main features and constructive elements of the work.

notice an overwhelming trend towards extra-musical preoccupations in the very act of composing itself. The consequences were the preponderance of opera and symphonic poems (the latter based on ever-increasing orchestral and choral means), and a virtual non-existence of chamber music. This, in its turn, brought with it: (a) a decadent sense of harmony which even in some of Wagner's operas is, during long stretches, *unfunctional* and only serves a descriptive and dramatic purpose, and (b) a total abandon of counterpoint which is one of the most powerful compositional devices.

Another important aspect of this crisis was the excessive specialization of composers. Whereas preceding generations had written works of every kind (chamber music, symphonic music, vocal music, church music, opera, etc.), Wagner, Verdi, and even Strauss, finally only wrote for the theatre, Bruckner and Mahler practically only symphonies and Hugo Wolf only songs. Even Brahms—less one-sided than the others—never wrote an opera, while Bach, for example, whose case in this respect is similar, had, all the same, used all the forms of dramatic singing (aria, arioso, recitativo) in his Passions and Cantatas.

Such a crisis was a threat to musical tradition as a whole, which has always expressed itself in a universal idiom capable of serving any particular musical enterprise.

It is also in this way that Schönberg appears through his very innovations as a highly traditional composer. His entire effort is directed towards a complete restitution of universality in the musical idiom.

His very early music already shows a masterly application of harmonic control and contrapuntal work, such as had ceased to exist during several generations of composers.

His *Chamber Symphony*, Op. 9, is a violent step forward. In order to understand the value and significance of this step, we must bear in mind that the specialization to which we have referred had also introduced a typical instrumental frame for every particular domain. The symphonic orchestra was, even in Mahler's symphonies, essentially the same for every work, chamber music used only a few stereotyped combinations, songs were mostly accompanied by the piano. Everything was conventional, the free instrumental choice, such as is to be found in Mozart's *Divertimentos* or in Bach's *Cantatas*, had completely



appeared. In this sense the mere words *chamber symphony* shows an effort to blend two styles. By diluting the solid, conventional instrumental apparatus and by reintroducing free combinations, Schönberg has found a possibility of getting away from the 'specialized' styles, and preparing the basis of a new, universal and absolute musical idiom.

Such a result is also confirmed by the twelve-tone technique, the formulation of which constitutes a technical apparatus of universal value. Any composer who is preoccupied with the advanced problems of contemporary polyphony can learn it and adapt it for his own purposes. Musicians like Webern and Berg have written their last works in the new technique. They do not resemble each other, nor do they resemble Schönberg himself, nor do they resemble any of the other younger composers who have adopted the same method of composition. One thing, however, they all have in common: that is, precisely, the musical idiom which they all use in spite of personal differences, differences of temperament, of inclination, and so on.

In this sense the Schönberg school is only a term one uses for convenience; factually, what Schönberg has done is much more than to found a school. He has made the world aware of the authentic laws of musicianship and, like every great master, has saved a tradition which without him might have been lost.

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In this article promotes an understanding of Schönberg's significance, its purpose will be fulfilled, although why one writes so much about Schönberg and does not play his music instead, is a question which I find difficult to answer.

## VICTOR SERGE

# LETTER FROM MEXICO

After the second World War, Mexico played the part of Switzerland in the nineteenth century and that of France at the beginning of the twentieth century, before June 1940: the part of a haven of refuge. Thus, in our convulsed world, the Atlantic fulfils the former function of the Mediterranean. In spite of transport difficulties, Mexico is sheltering 15,000 Spanish Republicans, 500 Poles, at least 1,500 Jews, and several hundred political

refugees of various origins. To all these vanquished people Mexico offers liberty without restrictions, and such great facilities for adaptation that, with the exception of a few intellectuals and invalids, all have solved the problem of material subsistence in a satisfactory manner, and some have rapidly made fortunes. This emigration, considerable for a country whose urban population does not exceed three and a half million inhabitants, has proved extremely profitable. The influx of educated Europeans has made itself felt in business, methods journalism, and the university world. Nevertheless, two important factors prevented the European emigration from exercising a wide intellectual influence:

(1) Latin-America received its intellectual and ideological stimuli from the social laboratories of Europe. These laboratories revealed to it democracy, parliament, Socialism, Anarchism, Communism, social Christianity, and modern literature and art. Then, suddenly, Paris, Rome, Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Leningrad and Moscow were silenced by destruction: London lived under a bombardment; Madrid, it is true, was inventing the Falangist doctrine of *Hispanidad*, but this took place in the bureaux of a Fascism which could meet with sympathy only in the most fanatical of reactionary circles. Publications, literature and ideas ceased to arrive from Europe, and the result was intellectual apathy, followed by profound discouragement. The oldest capitals of civilization could now give the world nothing but the insane example of fratricide and suicide.

(2) The refugee intellectuals, several hundred of them, although they included some really talented men, were deeply divided by Communism. The Communist Party, having considerable funds at its disposal, had great advantages over its Socialist and Liberal adversaries throughout the period of emigration, and it continued to benefit by the support of sympathizing workers' organizations such as the C.T.A.L. (*Confédération des Travailleurs de l'Amérique Latine*) and the C.T.M. (*Confédération des Travailleurs Mexicains*). Communism multiplied the political groups, and facilitated the material subsistence of its affiliated bodies. There were, and still are, committees of Free Germans, Free Austrians, Free Poles, Free Yugoslavs, Free Hungarians (several have changed their names), and an extensive Press, which dissociated itself from Communism only in exceptional circumstances. The anti-totalitarian Socialist emigration,

consisting, for its part, of men without support or funds, and being in a minority, was subjected by these organizations to a real persecution, accompanied by bloody assaults. The tomb of Trotsky, at Coyoacan, serves as a permanent warning to them. Thus disunited, the European intellectuals were able neither to rally Mexican sympathies nor to set up creative cultural centres. However, the participation of the United States in the war gave Mexico an opportunity for easy wealth. Dollars rolled in, and were amassed mostly by big business men and adventurers. Never before had things gone so well for those whose sole object was the possession and enjoyment of money. The prevailing atmosphere was definitely unfavourable to spiritual life. The great ideals of the Mexican revolution became obscured. The disorientation of the young people became more and more evident. A traditionally narrow catholicism and an anachronistic evolutionism sought to attract them, but never really animated them. Mexico has many cafés, but no literary café; a number of publications, but no review comparable to the N.R.F. of pre-war Paris, to *HORIZON*, to the *Partisan Review*, to *Politics*, or to *Sur* of Buenos Aires; no circle of poets or painters inspired by living conceptions; no Socialist movement. The Communist Party has organization, discipline, and an exaggerated influence due entirely to the prestige of the U.S.S.R., that is, it has not a shadow of an original idea. And yet, between 1910 and 1935, Mexico had a very intense spiritual life, as we may see from the impressive artistic, literary and political output. For those who know this spiritual life, it seems full of possibilities as yet unexpressed. The novelists, poets, fighters, combatants, and ideologists of yesterday are today members of the government, diplomats, high officials, financiers, directors of newspapers. . . . Academic activities are maintained at a high level, thanks to erudite men of letters like Alfonso Reyes and José Vasconcelos. The idealist philosopher, Antonio Caso, has just died suddenly. And I learn as I write that a most remarkable man, the historian of philosophy, Joaquin Xirau, a Catalan refugee, has just been rapidly killed in a road accident. . . .

Man is confronted by the problems of the present time with such terrifying harshness that he easily forms the tendency to turn away from them, be it to Greek philosophy, to historical studies, or to archaeology. Hence, doubtless, the activity of

academic thought, and its lack of creative spirit. In the archaeological field, however, fruitful work is being persistently accomplished in Mexico. Preparations are being made for excavations in the Constitution Square, built over the ruins of the pre-Columbian civilizations, whose architecture, arts and mythology were dazzlingly rich. For over twenty years, the exploration of this fund of culture has been undertaken with zeal and scientific faith; it leads us to a knowledge of the only civilizations of the age of polished stone and of bronze which persisted until the sixteenth century. In the provincial towns, at Oaxaca, at Morelia, museums of outstanding importance have been established. Treasures have been obtained from the archaeological zones of Monte-Alban, Tula, Testihuacan, and the Tarasca country. Others, no less rich, are as yet unexplored, owing to lack of means and man power. The only Maya civilization of Yucatan and Guatemala, moribund but already two thousand years old when the Conquistadors landed, merits comparison with the ancient Egyptian Empire in the grandeur of its creations. The archaeologist Alfonso Caso directs and co-ordinates these works with a systematic intelligence which has no fear of general ideas. A German refugee, Dr. Paul Kirchoff, has made a name for himself in these studies. A young American scholar, the author of an excellent work of synthesis on the Nahua culture (*The Aztecs of Mexico*), George Valliant, committed suicide a year after his very inaccurate comparison of the fall of Tenochtitlan with the defeat of France. The Americans supply funds, as well as some of the excavators. Monographs abound. So do discoveries. pre-Columbian art, which has greatly influenced the art of Mexico, seems to me to be destined, when it is better known, to enrich modern art.

I can think of nothing outstanding in the literary activities of Mexico during the war years. The German Communist writer, Anna Segers, wrote her novel *The Seventh Cross* here; it is highly praised, and has become a best-seller in the United States. Spanish writers have commented on the defeat of the Republic in terms of mystical philosophy, according to the precepts of St. John of Patmos, of course: Maximo José Kahn in *Apocalipsis Hispanica*, and Juan Larrea in *Rendición de Espíritu* (*Exhalation of the Spirit: to exhale the spirit, to die, to return the soul to God*). Other writers, boycotted because asphyxiating orders of silence were imposed



on non-mystical themes, accumulated their manuscripts: Benjamin Péret, Gustave Regler, myself . . . Michael Fraenckel, kept a journal of a meditative observer, as yet unpublished. Death struck us hard. The old German Marxist, Otto Rühle, combatant of the German revolution, adversary of Lenin, biographer of Marx, author of fifteen works, died at the age of 63, in poverty and isolation. His wife, the psychologist and pedagogue, Alice Gerstel-Rühle, committed suicide on the same day (June 1943). The Berlin psycho-analyst Frederick Fraenckel died the following year, aged 52, without being able to complete his recent works, notably on the psychology of Nazism. The altitude of Mexico City, seven thousand feet, is certainly not propitious to hearts strained by too many experiences.

To return to art. . . . The great Mexican school of painting attained its apogee between 1920 and the beginning of the war, during the final struggle and the stabilization of the revolutionary regime. Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco covered the walls of public buildings with imposing frescoes. This was a mural literature, historic, assertive, satiric, and also philosophic, adapted for the eyes of multitudes, more static and descriptive in the case of Rivera, and animated by violent, even cruel, dynamism in that of Orozco. Both drew inspiration from ancient Mexican motifs and from the Indian soul, in reaction against capitalism and colonial catholicism—which must not be confused with Christianity. Both made use of, and sometimes abused, blood, torture, convulsive suffering and frantic revolt. A superficial analysis reveals in them, together with a knowledge of the Renaissance mural artists, the persistence of a psychological tradition which, in its barbarity and its elements of materialistic pantheism, reaches back to the pre-Columbian civilizations. (These have left us some drawings and paintings, the *Codices*, and several frescoes.) President Don Lazaro Cardenas has encouraged the penetration of this art to the population in the outlying towns and even in the country. At Guadalajara there is Orozco's monumental work expressing social drama with a desperate fury; Juan Gorman's historical fresco at Patzcuaro; a fresco of Orozco's at Jiquilpan; and the carnal and planetary visions of fertility painted by Rivera at Chapingo. . . . You may suddenly find in a little town inhabited by Indian fishermen a whole mural poem, aphatic but eloquent, and immediately intelligible. In the

Mexican Hall of Justice you stop in front of the brutal compositions of Orozco, depicting a blind and drunken Justice carried away by a riot in the court, while a purple lightning flash pulverizes the stalls of the lawyers and judges. . . . (The American painter, Biddle, has just finished some tragic frescoes of war in the same building.) Orozco and Rivera are indefatigable craftsmen, who alternate obvious failures with most conspicuous successes. They continue to work, but without their former impetus. And how can they maintain an impetus which owes everything to the passion for social justice? A fresco of Juan Ogorman's was destroyed before the war because it denounced Hitler and Mussolini; another, the work of two young men, Vlady, a Russian, and Ivan Denegri, a Mexican, was destroyed during the war because it contained an unfavourable allusion to Stalin. . . . Amongst the new works inspired by the revolutionary romanticism of the day before yesterday, I must mention Alfaro Siqueiros' Republic, with bared breasts, breaking her chains. (This painter, whose talent as a mural artist is undeniable, was implicated in an attempt to assassinate Trotsky in May 1940. He is still under the shadow of prosecution.)

Foreign artists who came to Mexico in search of refuge or to escape from industrial America, have continued work which they began under the influence of Surrealism. I have visited in Indian villages studios in the best Montparnasse tradition. Since they have no public in Mexico, these innovating artists either exhibit in New York or not at all, like the German Impressionist Otto Butterlin, who lives in a village in Jalisco, and has taken to cultivating tropical produce. Wolfgang Paalen (an Austrian formed by French culture) edited in Mexico a review of Indian and modern art, *Dyn*, which sold mainly in the United States. His work in scientific philosophy has led him to an aesthetic conception which he has, to the eyes of an uninitiated spectator, translated to his canvas in visions suggested by atomic and cosmic physics. The result is very impressive painting, of high quality. Alice Paalen, a Frenchwoman, and also a genuine poet, has exhibited some imaginary landscapes and ornamental motifs inspired by the art of the North American Indians. Gordon Onslow-Ford, from London, lives in a village in the Michoacan country, where he has evolved, in the proximity of an immense landscape of take and mountain, some rigorously personal and carefully

editated works, which, by abstract methods, seek not to produce the palpable world, but to summarize it in terms of notional plastic forms. 'I have found', he writes, 'a language of forms, colours, lines and dots which expresses a vision of the world that, within its own limits, is a complete reality in itself, related to other realities through feeling.' Living in the same village, a young American painter, William Fett, has produced some striking 'non-objective' water-colours, directly inspired by the vivid and devastating harshness of the Mexican countryside, which have been very well received in the United States. After several years of hesitation, Eleonora Carrington has resumed her writing and painting, in a narrow little room in old Mexico, the most dream-saturated place I know here. Her present work, clearly revealing the influence of the Primitives, is, in my opinion, a astonishing example of the direct projection on to canvas of an intense, anguished, yet luminously adolescent inner life. Wolfgang and Alice Paalen, Gordon Onslow-Ford, Eleonora Carrington, and Esteban Francès (who is also working in Mexico) have all belonged to the Surrealist movement, which they left for various reasons. I have the impression that the doctrine of creative automatism and the super-real, culminating as it does in automaticity, not to say conventionalism, and sometimes even commercialization, has revealed too many intrinsic weaknesses to satisfy artists whose talent has reached maturity. The Surrealism which followed the last war was connected with the revolts of the epoch, but it is swallowed up in the upheavals of the present time, which call for a renewal of ideas in all fields.

Among the Spanish artists, a young deaf and dumb man, Marcia Narezo, has attracted attention by his exceptional virtuosity in combining in his already abundant output the techniques of Picasso, Dali and the Abstractivists with those of realism, and this with a sense of drawing, colour and life which places him in the first rank. The Catalan draughtsman Bartoli has published a nightmarish book about the French concentration camps, and has proved himself an excellent interpreter of the Mexican landscape. And old man of nearly seventy, Francisco Tortosa, a Republican refugee, began to paint a few years ago, and has just exhibited about twenty canvases whose candour and spontaneity recall the style of the Douanier Rousseau: their youthfulness and vigorous clarity are most striking. Tortosa is

haunted by a dream of paradise. Straightforward, traditional Spanish painting, impregnated with reflections of Goya and Zuloaga, abounds ingloriously. From amongst the Mexicans, I would single out the vast landscapes of Dr. Atl, an old man, enamoured of volcanic solitudes; they evoke Nietzschean poems. The Indian, Maria Izquierdo, paints long canvases in colours which, beneath their evident clumsiness, have the simple vigour of good imagery. Frida Kahlo remains the initiator of a too widely imitated *genre*, which may be described as visceral. Roots become arteries and veins, flesh decomposes, and the anatomic incision obscures the portrait. The success of this 'school' has a psychological significance which it would be superfluous to analyse.

The most extraordinary Mexican artist, and the most productive too, is anonymous and multiple, and does not know himself. It is the humble Indian of the villages, who, following age-old traditions, makes, for the country markets, small, everyday masterpieces—toys, masks, earthenware, wickerwork amulets, magic ornaments, costumes for ritual dances. It is a universal characteristic of this popular art, whose creations are sold for a few centavos, that its medium is perishable, valueless material: wood, straw, feathers, vegetable fibre, cardboard, paper, clay, glass, manipulated with an instinctively gifted workmanship, to which time counts for nothing. The bird made of coloured straws will last only a few hours, but it is perfect. The sugar Death's Head will be eaten on All Saints' Day, but it is magnificent, and is a direct descendant of the rock-crystal Death's Heads made by Zapotec craftsmen about the year one thousand. The funeral procession, in cardboard and tissue paper, with a white figure in the little coffin, evokes the lovely works of the Middle Ages, but it costs a few cents, and will disappear. It is a manifold ephemeral and living art, which passes unnoticed. The beautiful durable materials, metal or textile, are increasingly monopolized by an industry which standardizes mediocre products for the use of tourists. . . . One must leave the buildings and banks of the capital behind in order still to find, in the country, native woven materials, artless embroideries, and noble feathered tiaras like those worn in the time of Montezuma.

[Translated by NATALIA GALITZINE]



## SELECTED NOTICES

*Language, Truth and Logic*. A. J. Ayer. Gollancz. Second edition, 1946.

This is a delightful book, to which I can give the sincerest praise possible, namely that I should like to have written it myself when young. Like Hume's *Treatise*, it is enthusiastic, iconoclastic, hopeful, and good-humouredly pugnacious; fortunately, unlike Hume's *Treatise*, it did not 'fall still-born from the press'. The Introduction to the new edition displays admirable candour, and shows that Mr. Ayer has spent the intervening years to good purpose: what has been lost of early *élan* is more than compensated by the gain in maturity.

As a first approximation, the book has my sympathy, but taken as a final statement it seems to me in some points to take an over-simplified view, partly the result of polemical zeal. If, in what follows, I dwell upon disagreements, I hope the reader to remember the background of general agreement, and not to let my admiration of Mr. Ayer's very exceptional clarity.

Let us tackle first a very vital question, that of the connection of verifiability with significance or meaning. If a sentence which is not a tautology is not to be completely senseless', Mr. Ayer demands 'not indeed that it should be conclusively verifiable, but that some possible sense-experience should be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood'. One may question both the criterion, and the use that is made of it. To begin with the definition of 'significance' of sentences: I should myself define it syntactically. I should say that a sentence is significant if its words are understood and they are put together according to correct rules of syntax. Many sentences that obey this rule are not capable of verification—for instance, 'there are distant nebulae receding from us with a velocity greater than that of light' or 'Napoleon was happy in St. Helena'. The question of the definition of 'significance', however, may be regarded as purely verbal; more substantial is the question of the interpretation of Mr. Ayer's definition.

In what sense, for example, is physics verifiable? Mr. Ayer argues that all sentences which seem to mention unperceivable physical objects can be translated into sentences mentioning only Mr. Ayer's experiences. I do not think that this is true or that it follows from his criterion. The argument for the probable truth of physics is that, whenever its principles lead to a verifiable conclusion, the conclusion is verified if the necessary steps are taken. It is held (somewhat optimistically, I admit) that if the principles were false the verifiable conclusions would probably sometimes be false. There is, therefore, sense-experience relevant to the truth of physical principles, but that does not mean that the principles themselves can be interpreted in terms of sense-experience. We look for simple laws, and in order to make laws as simple as possible we do not hesitate to assume occurrences which we not only do not, but cannot, observe. I do not believe it possible to state the laws of physics without assuming unobservable occurrences.

Mr. Ayer speaks with approval of Mill's definition of 'matter' as a 'permanent possibility of sensation'. But what is a 'possibility'? It can only mean something which would occur if something else occurred which in fact does not occur. But how are we to know what would have happened if . . .? This does not substantiate anything more than what does happen when . . . And I think this trouble

about possibility affects the whole conception of verifiability as opposed to actual verification: when something has not been verified, there is no clear meaning to the statement that it was verifiable. To say that it was verifiable presumably means that it would have been verified if something had been the case that in fact was not the case, and no one can decide how much that did not happen we may imagine to have happened in defining 'verifiability'. Altogether, I should say, 'possibility' is a vague and dangerous notion, which should not be allowed to intrude into such a fundamental matter as the question when a sentence is significant.

Let us take a more mundane example than the principles of physics. Consider the statement 'Napoleon III had a father'. We all believe this, though no one knows who he was, and very likely no one ever has known. We believe it because we believe in certain causal laws. Similarly we believe that our sensations have causes, though as a rule these causes lie outside our experience. I do not see why anybody should make a difficulty about such inferences, if they accept the inferences as to our own experiences that are obtained by means of them. Mr. Ayer has difficulties about the minds of other people, which seem to me quite unnecessary. When I believe that so-and-so has a toothache, I do not mean that if I were a dentist and were to examine his teeth I should see a cavity. And empiricism does not demand that I should mean this, if it is admitted that a hypothesis may be rendered probable by the truth of all its verified consequences.

The statement that the world existed before there was life, whether true or false, seems to me clearly significant; so does the statement that there is a future life, although Mr. Ayer maintains that to assert and to deny a future life are alike meaningless. In this he seems to me to go beyond even his own criterion. Verification is always in the future, and if there is a future life we shall, in due course, have empirical evidence of it. He might have said that the denial of a future life was meaningless, for if we do not survive death we shall never have any evidence of the fact. But if we do survive death we shall have the same kind of evidence as for the statement 'it will rain tomorrow', which also cannot be verified at present. It is true that Mr. Ayer bases his argument on the view that 'the soul' is meaningless, in which I agree with him. But he defines personal identity in terms not involving 'the soul', and, so defined, the question whether we survive death is surely not meaningless.

For my part, I am an unrepentant realist, in a sense which Mr. Ayer would condemn. I believe that the universe existed for countless ages before there were percipients; I believe that tables and chairs and other people are not functions of my perceptions. Since I can understand the sentence 'A is before B', I can understand the sentence: 'There were occurrences before I was born'. And I see no reason to interpret this sentence in a Pickwickian sense. And when I say 'you are hot', I do not mean that I can see the sweat; I mean that you are having a feeling which I am not having, though of a kind with which I am familiar.

However, I have been led into being more critical than I feel. Mr. Ayer is wholly rational, and I do not doubt that, if arguments against him are valid, he will admit their validity. This is a very rare merit.

BERTRAND RUSSELL

*Auto-da-Fé*. By Elias Canetti. Cape, 15s.

*Auto-da-Fé*. By Henry Green. The Hogarth Press, 8s. 6d.

*Folded Leaf*. By William Maxwell. Faber, 8s. 6d.

DISPLEASING quality in most modern novels is a certain hesitancy, a diffidence, a tendency to falter and, when faltering, to cover hesitation with irrelevance. Thus one often embarks on what appears to be a realistic sociological study only to find sudden arbitrary divagations into fantasy, sudden change and inappropriate verbal inflations, uneasy incursions into the territory of Freud. It is as if the novelist, afraid to back only his first choice for a win, divided a part of his total outlay among most improbable outsiders. Could the book be condemned as a whole, then at least this passage or that might win approval. An unfaltering loyalty to their initial intention is one of the very few common qualities of Mr. Canetti and Mr. Green. From the first page of each of these books one is conscious of a ferocious sense of direction, of a clear and elaborate forethought. One knows, and how greatly it enhances one's confidence to know it, that the writer has a pre-ordained course which he will follow without flinching.

Mr. Canetti's course required the greater courage, so great that even the reader is conscious of heroism as he nears the conclusion of this gigantic and compromising novel. *Auto-da-Fé* is long, turgid and repetitive. Blow after blow is directed at the reader's head with the bluntest possible of instruments. In any case I emerged so battered that 'impressive' was the single, inarticulate word of criticism which had survived the ordeal. It was only after I had recovered my strength that reperusal was able to give me some notion of the qualities of this book in reference to others. This in itself is a most unusual quality, the capacity to imprison a reader within these five hundred odd pages, to block up every chink of light from the outside. Impressive remains the first virtue which one must pay.

At a late point in *Auto-da-Fé* Canetti twice emerges from his self-created prison to inform the reader why he prefers to live there rather than in the open world. These are welcome and quite unexpected concessions. He complains indignantly of the 'ordinary' novelist that his task is 'to reduce the angular, the painful, biting multifariousness of life as it is all around him, to the smooth surface of a sheet of paper, on which it can pleasantly and swiftly be read off'. A few pages later the solitary amiable character of the book is confronted with a madman. 'He saw himself as an insect in the presence of a man. He asked himself, how could he understand things which came from depths a thousand times deeper than any he had ever dared to plumb.' These are the two fanatical beliefs which drive the book forward, the belief that it is the duty of the novelist to deal fully with all the pain and bitterness and horror of contemporary life, and the belief that madness is in some sense (the sense appears to change occasionally from time to time) superior to sanity. The first belief is perfectly conventional; it is only in Canetti's curious interpretation of it that unconventionality is evident, and even here it is an unconventionality purely of degree. There is *nothing* in this book except pain, bitterness and horror. Now this is a damaging criticism of a book unless we are judging it by the very highest standards of all. The *Inferno* would still be a great work of art without its horrors, though it is only in conjunction with the *Paradiso* that it is supremely

great. Chiaroscuro may be a quality which gives us pleasure on any level; it is a quality which is altogether necessary on the highest level of all, but the absence of it is not a condemnation. Canetti has written an *Inferno* without a *Paradiso*, and for my part I must confess to being more appalled by the mental torments of this book than by the physical torments of Dante. Putting my reaction at its lowest, I would say that *Auto-da-Fé* got most horribly under my skin. The pain, horror and bitterness of the book are not gratuitous. Isolated, concentrated and enlarged they are the horrors which we know, the horrors of our time and of our own minds.

Canetti's prison is the prison of obsession. Every one of the hundred odd characters in the book is obsessed, some of them to the point of madness. The hero has substituted books for human beings, his brother is obsessed by his power over the eight hundred madmen in his asylum, an inspector of police by his nose, a hunchback by chess, and nearly all the minor characters by money. In freudian terms (which never make an appearance in this book though they are everywhere implicit) it is a study of that anal fixation on acquisition for its own sake which is the most dangerous and dominant malady of our time. Where there is serious confusion is in Canetti's attitude to madness. There are moments, as we have seen, when he explicitly makes madness superior to sanity (a piece of childish romanticism which is quite unworthy of him), yet his use of madness as a weapon against his readers is incompatible with this rather gratuitous dogma. He uses it to isolate and intensify the obsessive elements in all of us. Hypocrite lecteur, he is forever insisting, this is you; yes, this disgusting, insane creature who makes you draw up your skirts, is you yourself. In fact, madness is a device, and a perfectly legitimate one, for forcing home on the reader the writer's disgust at himself and at all around him. It could not be anything else, for there are few psychoses indeed which are anything more noble than extreme forms of attitudes which we recognize and abhor in ourselves. Would one really feel in the presence of a paranoiac or a manic depressive that he understands things which come from depths a thousand feet deeper than any we have dared to plumb?

What Canetti has done is to write a very long and terrible sermon, a jeremiad. It is much in the manner of the sermon in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, but between twenty and thirty times as long. Its weakness as a sermon is that it is not oral and consequently nobody is compelled to listen to it. A second and more serious weakness is that, while it breeds disgust and horror in abundance, it does not, in this reader's experience, breed any impulse to amendment. For there is nowhere in the book the smallest glimmer of an escape from the inferno in which we only too readily recognize ourselves to be. It would be gravely irrelevant to judge *Auto-da-Fé* as a work of art, for any such intention is adjoined in every line of it. The intensification of obsessions has nothing whatever in common with the process by which art intensifies real life. The purpose is denunciation, and it is most triumphantly and distressingly achieved.

It might at first seem that Henry Green's new novel is also concerned with obsession. *Back* is the story of an English prisoner of war's first months in England after several years' absence. While he has been away his girl has died, and his 'obsession' takes the form of believing that her half-sister is herself,



alive, but refusing to recognize him. This belief colours all his vision, so the whole panorama of post-war England is seen from a strange hallucinatory angle. But hallucination is very different indeed from obsession, and astonishing self-induced hallucinations which Henry Green always, to a greater or a lesser extent, achieves lie at the very centre of the artistic problem. The nature of obsession is to be blinkered, to see one narrow strip of the road to the exclusion of everything else. The nature of hallucination is to see far wider over the landscape but to see everything through strange-coloured spectacles. Hallucination may be a new revelation of the real world; obsession is the distortion of reality. In the case of Green, one feels that he has stepped constantly through a looking glass and is looking back at us with a certain calm and appraising satisfaction. What is really amazing about this novelist is that he can comfortably remain in the extraordinary positions which he chooses for the whole duration of a book. One genuinely wonders how he is able to inhabit the normal world at the same time (though I have seen him do it with perfect dexterity). Reading *Back*, which I take to be very nearly as good a work as he has ever written, I never for one moment had the sense of a deliberate fantasy being woven about me. In fact there is nothing fantastic about the book. People talk precisely as their prototypes talk in the world we know, for in his wealth of gifts Green includes an ear for conversation which is as accurate as Pritchett's or Elizabeth Bowen's. Even the behaviour of the characters is normal, with the single exception of the hero's; and the hero is a chosen device for throwing doubts on the normality which surrounds him. In all really good novels, the unique quality of the writer's vision is beyond the power of description in any terms but his own. I can only write that the world looks altogether new through the eyes of this book and that this novelty of vision seems to me to be the most important as well as the most difficult achievement for the modern novelist.

*The Folded Leaf*, written by the editor of the *New Yorker*, is a serious and thoughtful attempt to give that kind of new vision which Green appears to achieve so effortlessly. This study of the school and college lives of two American boys, of their fears and jealousy and mutual love, is rather uneasily stretched to an anthropological analogy with the customs of savage tribes. The process seems too cerebral as well as a little too obvious. We accept the analogy from the first moment that it is presented, and it did not need rejection. The vision is not innocent as in Green, but academic and a little self-conscious. But when this has been said, when Mr. Maxwell's failure to achieve a genuine new vision has been admitted, the book deserves very high praise indeed. It is a marvellously sympathetic and understanding, yet altogether unromantic account of the barbarities and miseries of youth. Incidentally Mr. Maxwell has very finely expressed what Green has magnificently exemplified: 'The truth . . . masquerades in inversions and paradoxes, is easier to get at by a lie than in an honest statement. If pursued, the truth withdraws, puts on a false face after another, and finally goes underground, where it can only be got at in the complex, agonizing absurdity of dreams.'

PHILIP TOYNBEE

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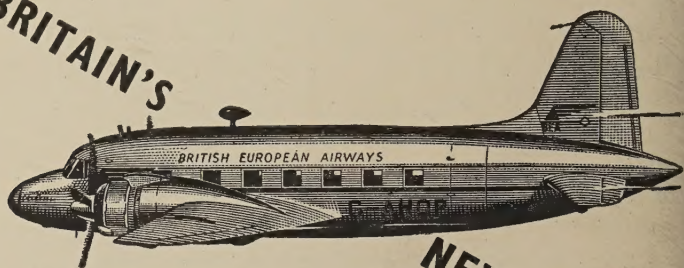
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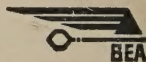
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